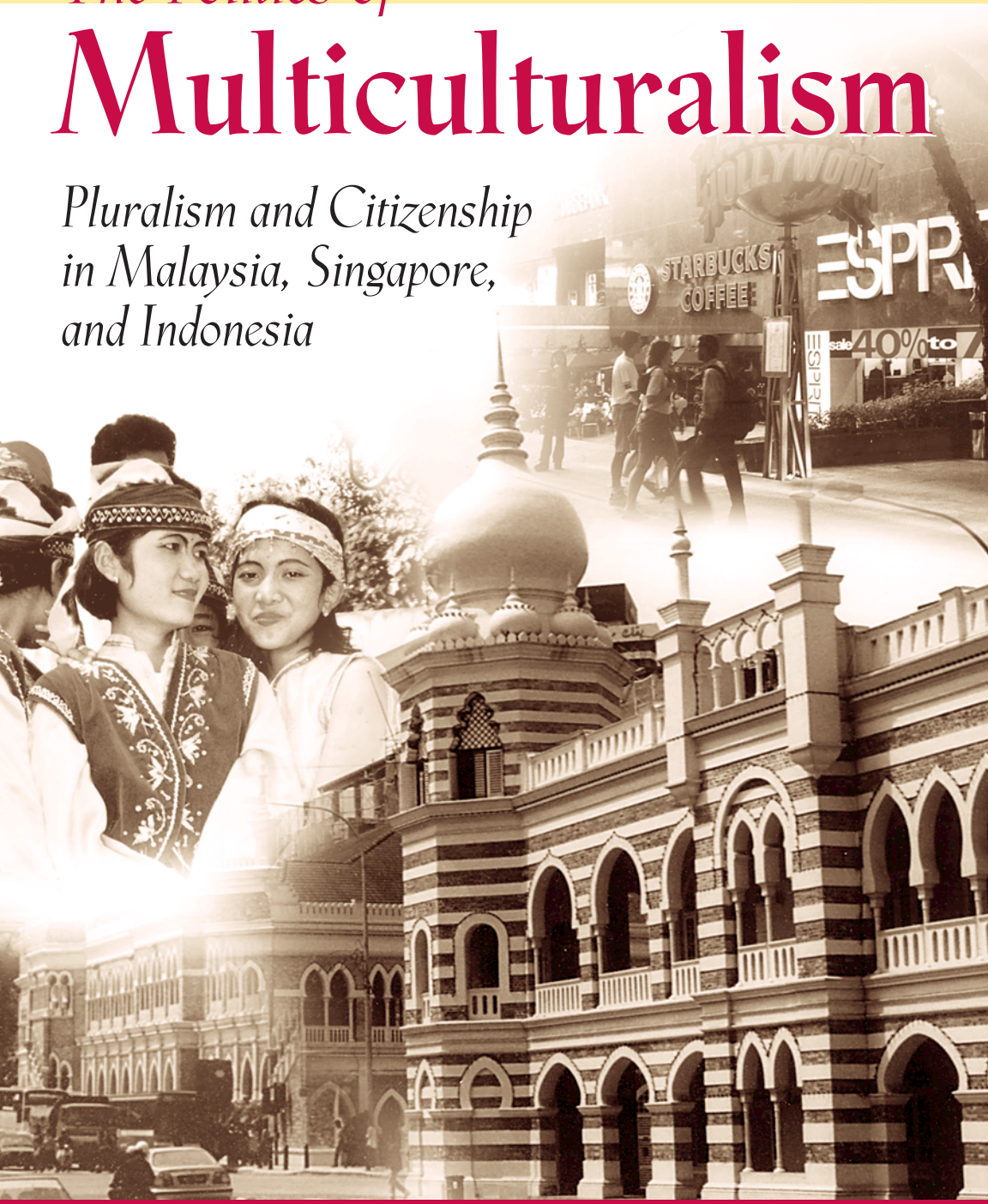
# *The Politics of* Multiculturalism

## *Pluralism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia*




*Edited by* Robert W. Hefner

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# The Politics of Multiculturalism

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## *Pluralism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia*

EDITED BY
ROBERT W. HEFNER

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# Contents

Acknowledgments vii

**1** Introduction: Multiculturalism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia 1
*Robert W. Hefner*

**2** The Culture and Practice of Pluralism in Postcolonial Malaysia 59
*Abdul Rahman Embong*

**3** Social Pluralism in Singapore 86
*Chua Beng Huat and Kwok Kian-Woon*

**4** Social Resources for Civility and Participation: The Case of Yogyakarta, Indonesia 119
*Mohtar Mas'oed, S. Rizal Panggabean, and Muhammad Najib Azca*

**5** Boundaries and Beyond: Whither the Cultural Bases of Political Community in Malaysia? 141
*Sumit K. Mandal*

**6** Corporate Pluralism: Singapore Inc. and the Association of Muslim Professionals 165
*Sharon Siddique*

**7** Where Has (Ethnic) Politics Gone?: The Case of the BN Non-Malay Politicians and Political Parties 183
*Francis Loh Kok Wah*

**8** The Redefinition of Politics and the Transformation of Malaysian Pluralism 204
*Shamsul A.B.*

**9** What Islam, Whose Islam?: Sisters in Islam and the Struggle for Women's Rights 227
*Zainah Anwar*

**10** Gender and Pluralism in Indonesia 253
*Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin*

**11** Mirroring the Past or Reflecting the Future?: Class and Religious Pluralism in Indonesian Labor 268
*Vedi R. Hadiz*

**12** Greens in the Rainbow: Ethnoreligious Issues and the Indonesian Armed Forces 291
*Hermawan Sulistiyo*

Contributors 311

Index 313

# Acknowledgments

The contributors to this book were part of a two-year research and training project that I organized with the support of the Ford Foundation from 1998 to 2000. Entitled "Southeast Asian Pluralisms: Social Resources for Civility and Participation in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia," the project was a joint collaboration between Ford and the Program on Civil Society and Civic Culture at the Institute for the Study of Economic Culture (ISEC) at Boston University. The project had several distinct aims, but its most important was to encourage Malaysian, Singaporean, and Indonesian public intellectuals to reflect on the challenge of ethnic, religious, and gender pluralism for citizenship in their respective societies. I met with researchers in small groups and individually during 1998. Those carrying out fieldwork then did so in late 1998 and the first half of 1999. Most but not all of the researchers then came together in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, during the first week of August 1999 to discuss the preliminary results of their research at a conference jointly sponsored by Ford, ISEC, and the Institute for Malaysian and International Studies (IKMAS) of the Universiti Kebangsaan. All of the participants continued to exchange materials and ideas through mid-2000; this book is the fruit of those discussions. Some among the researchers also continued carrying out interviews, and several plan additional publications in months to come.

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# The Politics of Multiculturalism

# 1

# Introduction

## Multiculturalism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia

*Robert W. Hefner*

Few challenges to the modern dream of democratic citizenship appear more daunting than the presence of severe ethnic, religious, and linguistic divisions in society. From early on in the modern era, Western liberal theorists were pessimistic about the prospects for democratic governance in deeply plural countries. In the nineteenth century, no less colossal a figure than J. S. Mill wrote that "Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. Among a people without fellow-feeling, especially if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion, necessary to the working of representative government, cannot exist" (Mill 1958, 230). There is an irony here. Nineteenth-century liberals like Mill were eager to accommodate the plurality of utilitarian interests among buyers and sellers in the marketplace. When it came to public life and politics, however, these same liberals "were strikingly unready for a plurality of cultures" (Walzer 1996, 53).

In the years that followed the First World War, a few Western thinkers expressed confidence that democracy might yet be possible in multicultural societies. Ratified after the Great War, the charter for the League of Nations seemed a breakthrough in this regard, balancing the rights of cultural majorities with those of minorities. The racial and ethnic horrors of World War II, however, led to widespread disillusionment with formulas like these that acknowledged communal identities. Individually based rights came to be viewed as the only acceptable form of human rights, and the central issue toward which democratic protections should be oriented.

"Where these individual rights are firmly protected, liberals assumed, no further rights needed to be attributed to the members of specific ethnic or national minorities" (Kymlicka 1995, 2–3).

The years following the Second World War also saw a revival of the old pessimism concerning the prospects for democracy in deeply plural societies. The new consensus was canonized in the "modernization theory" that dominated Western political thought in the 1950s and 1960s. A key premise of the theory was that democracy is impossible without modernization, and modernization requires the homogenization of political culture. Where this ideological homogeneity is wanting, the state must take the lead in inculcating a common culture among its diverse citizenry. The influential Harvard political scientist, Samuel P. Huntington, put the matter none too subtly when he declared that national integration requires "the replacement of a large number of traditional, religious, familial, and ethnic political authorities by a single, secular, national political authority" (Huntington 1968, 34). Without the state-promoted pruning of ethnoreligious solidarities, it seemed, democracy and civil peace are in peril.[1]

For many observers, the difficulties democratic institutions encountered in some of the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa in the 1960s seemed to confirm this pessimism. As a result of these and other developments, then, the problem of cultural pluralism faded from discussion in mainstream political theory, except for its occasional citation as an obstacle to democratic progress. Global developments since the early 1990s, however, have made it impossible to continue treating the issue in so offhanded a manner. The collapse of communism in Eastern Europe raised new hopes for the spread of liberal democracy to former communist countries. As painfully illustrated in the Balkans and Caucuses, however, most of the ex-communist countries were deeply plural, and the collapse was sometimes followed, not by a democratic peace, but by fierce ethnoreligious rivalries for control of the state. Unless we were to give up on the dream of democratization in these countries entirely, there seemed no way around the fact that policy makers and theorists had to come to terms again with the problem of pluralism and democracy.

Another development forcing the problem of pluralism back into democratic discussion in the 1990s and 2000s was a vast increase in immigration to Western countries. In the United States, the immigration was the largest seen since the Great Immigration of the 1890s; in Europe, the immigration was so massive as to be without modern precedent. Not insignificantly, the arriving population included a far greater number of non-Europeans than had historically figured in these countries' immigrant pool. In addition, the immigration took place at a time of ethnic revival

in the advanced industrial societies and ethnoreligious resurgence in much of the developing world.[2] In Western Europe, the changing cultural and racial complexion of the immigration helped to revive the fortunes of the extreme right, which used attacks on immigrants and supporters of multicultural citizenship as a rallying cry (Modood 1997). The immigration forced more moderate, mainstream citizens to recognize that, if they ever *had*, they no longer lived in pristine nation-states huddled around a common ethnonationalist hearth. European nations, too, were becoming deeply plural, with ethnoreligious subcultures distinct from those hallowed in nationalist mythologies.

The United States, Canada, and Australia have always had a different policy on immigrants and national culture than the countries of continental Europe, a pattern that has come to be known in political literature as the "Anglo-American" or "Anglo conformist" model (Almond 1956; Lijphart 1977; Kymlicka 1995, 14). These were settler societies that had not hesitated to displace native inhabitants from their homelands. Consistent with the settler project, these countries were more willing than their continental counterparts to welcome foreign immigrants—as long as the newcomers were willing and able to assimilate to mainstream linguistic, cultural, and racial prototypes. However, the scale of immigration in the 1980s and 1990s changed the terms of the Anglo-American contract once and for all. The immigration made it easier for minorities, old and new, to resist mainstream demands for assimilation and assert their identities more boldly. As in Western Europe, minority boldness ignited the passions of the extreme right, and prompted even mainstream citizens to wonder about the possibilities of civic collaboration across deep cultural divides.

For these and other reasons, in recent years we have seen renewed interest in the problem of democracy and cultural pluralism or, to borrow a more precise phrase from Will Kymlicka (1995), "multicultural citizenship." Unfortunately, however, most writers on the topic still take Western industrialized societies as the privileged point of entry to their discussion. In an era of galloping globalization, however, when not just some, but most countries are comprised of culturally diverse populations, it is helpful to remember that non-Western societies have their own history of pluralist challenge and their own need to devise meaningful formulas for its resolution. Of course, if, in the best tradition of normative political philosophy, we are merely concerned with determining "the extent to which society meets norms of justice, individual freedom and deliberative democracy" (Kymlicka and Norman 2000, 15), our gaze need not be decentered too far from familiar Western terrains. Although it shares much

with political philosophy, however, the sociology or anthropology of pluralism and democracy must be concerned, not merely with measuring a society's conformity to a checklist of liberal ideals, but with understanding the cultural and sociological circumstances that make different responses to the problem of pluralism and citizenship likely. What conditions facilitate peaceful coexistence and inclusive participation in multicultural societies? What conditions undermine these goals? Must the political formulas for addressing the problem of multiculturalism and citizenship be the same in all countries? Or must they vary in a manner that requires us to engage local genealogies of knowledge and power?

The question of how to achieve civility and inclusive citizenship in deeply plural societies is today a near-universal one. An understanding of the conditions that facilitate its resolution is as urgently needed in non-Western societies as well as Western ones. This knowledge can enrich the Western experience even as it deepens our understanding of the possibility of democracy across cultures. The first aim of the essays in this volume is to contribute to just such a pool of comparative knowledge.

## Plural Societies, Created

Few areas of the non-Western world illustrate the legacy and challenge of cultural pluralism in a manner more striking than the Southeast Asian countries of Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia. In Western political theory during the 1930s and 1940s, the colonial predecessors to these societies, then known as British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies, were regarded as the locus classicus for the newly minted concept of "plural society." In a series of widely read works prepared in the final years of Western colonialism in Southeast Asia (Furnivall 1944, 1948), the British administrator and political writer, J. S. Furnivall, introduced Western readers to the idea of plural societies, and identified the countries we today call Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore as its most striking examples.

For Furnivall, a plural society is a society that comprises "two or more elements or social orders which live side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit" (Furnivall 1944, 446). As with Chinese, Indians, and Malays in British Malaya, this combination of geographical propinquity and social segregation, Furnivall argued, is accompanied by a caste-like division of labor, in which ethnoreligious groups play different economic roles. This social segregation in turn gives rise to what Furnivall regarded as these societies' most unsettling political trait: their lack of a "common social will."

There was a larger logic to this last argument. Like many British scholars and civil servants in his time, Furnivall was an avid student of neoclassical economics. His studies of the economies of Burma and Indonesia remain among the finest written in the late colonial period. As an observer of European colonialism, however, Furnivall was also aware that economics alone can never grasp the full logic of human behavior or social organization. He remarked, for example, that Adam Smith and later economists "took for granted the existence and efficacy of social demand." Furnivall defined social demand as the shared tastes, values, and identities that an individual "experiences as a member of that society and can satisfy [only] as a member of that society" (Furnivall 1944, 448). For Furnivall, the Smithian assumption of cultural homogeneity is an acceptable simplification in England, "with its conservative traditions and its stable institutions," but it overlooks a critical problem in societies like those in insular Southeast Asia: how to facilitate peaceful and cooperative interaction in a society whose denizens have no sense of themselves as a people or culture. In settings like these, Furnivall believed, the ethnic and religious "sections" making up society are so different from one another that they have little in common than their market exchange.

The reason this is troubling, Furnivall argued (in a manner that echoed the great French sociologist, Émile Durkheim), is that the market and "interests" are fickle guarantees of civil peace. In countries whose inhabitants hold common values, "fellow-feelings" based on mutuality and shared identity help to guide citizens through the thicket of daily life, in a manner that keeps the pursuit of market interests in acceptable ethical bounds. In such felicitous circumstances, the division of labor that Adam Smith celebrated as the genius of the market does not obliterate the common will or create a war of each against all, but allows the pursuit of private welfare within a "standpoint of common citizenship" (1944, 451). The situation in a plural society, by contrast, offers no such softening of the all-too-visible hand of marketplace competition:

> [T]he community tends to be organized for production rather than for social life; social demand is sectionalized, and within each section of the community the social demand becomes disorganized and ineffective, so that in each section the members are debarred from leading the full life of a citizen in a homogeneous community; finally, the reaction against these abnormal conditions, taking in each section the form of Nationalism, sets one community against the other so as to emphasize the plural character of the society and aggravate its instability, thereby enhancing the need for it to be held together by some force exerted from outside. (1944, 459)

Furnivall's insights into what we might today call the culturally "embedded" nature of capitalism were useful correctives to the narrowly economistic understandings of markets and rationality widespread in his day (and, alas, still in ours).[3] But there was an irony to Furnivall's contrast between the plural societies of Asia and the "homogeneous" societies of the West. His model made no mention of the troubling presence of racial, ethnic, religious, or gender chauvinism in Western countries. All the more ironic, it did so at a time when European civilization was being ravaged by ethnic and racial hatreds more horrifying than anything ever seen in Southeast Asia.[4] Furnivall's model of Southeast Asian pluralisms also overlooked the way in which Europeans had imported chauvinistic customs into their colonial holdings (Gouda 1995; Stoler 1989). However strong their appetite for a liberal marketplace, European colonials showed a decidedly illiberal taste for reserving the commanding heights of politics, culture, and society for themselves.

To his credit, Furnivall criticized the racial ideologies of the European powers, describing them as "quasi-religious sanctions for the predominance of the European caste both in British India and in Netherlands India" (1944, 464). But he failed to develop this insight in a sustained manner, saying little about the ways in which at least some of the "segmentary" interaction he observed in native society was the product of deliberate European engineering. Instead of a sustained critique of colonial complicities, Furnivall fell back on a wistful paean for the passing of the colonial order. With the rise of native nationalist movements, Furnivall sensed, European colonialism's days were numbered. In his view, however, Asian nationalisms offered no solution to the problems of identity and integration in these deeply divided countries. Nationalism, he believed, would end only by pitting one ethnic community against another, exacerbating rather than ameliorating society's divisions. Unless some kind of formula for pluralist federation could be devised, Southeast Asian pluralism seemed doomed to a nightmarish "anarchy" (Furnivall 1944, 468–469).

Not long after Furnivall put his thoughts to paper, colonialism did come to an end in these three countries—in 1945 in Indonesia (formalized by a treaty with the Dutch in December 1949), in 1957 in Malaysia, and in 1959 in Singapore.[5] Although the Europeans forfeited their role as colonial masters, independence did not quite push these countries into the abyss of anarchy Furnivall had forecast The new native leadership proved more skilled at operating the machinery of government than Furnivall had imagined.

At least some of the concerns Furnivall had voiced, however, were confirmed in the postwar and independence era. Malaysia was swept by

fierce ethnic violence in the years following World War II and again in 1969. Chinese-dominated Singapore witnessed ethnic riots in 1964, and in 1965 was forced out of its two-year federation with Malaysia after a dispute over the rights of Malay and Chinese citizens. Indonesia saw outbreaks of communal violence in the late 1950s and 1965; more shocking yet, Indonesia was shaken by bitter ethnoreligious violence from 1996 to 2001. Less dramatic but heated debates over ethnic and religious policies have regularly disturbed the postcolonial peace in each of these countries. Faced with these troubles, each country's leaders have had to scramble to devise workable programs for citizenship and nation. As the essays in this volume demonstrate, however, the formulas devised in each country have varied, in a way that reflects colonial histories, postcolonial legacies, and, most tellingly, contemporary contests among rival groupings in state and society.

What makes these countries' experience all the more intriguing is that, despite their political problems, from the late 1960s to the beginning of the East Asian economic crisis in August 1997, these three countries enjoyed one of the most sustained periods of economic expansion the industrializing world has ever seen (Hefner 1998a). For the better part of a generation these countries saw annual rates of GDP growth of 6 percent to 8 percent. The growth brought a new middle class into existence and allowed dramatic increases in per capita income. Today Singapore is an affluent country by any standard. Barely on par with Ethiopia in the early 1960s, Indonesia today is in the upper ranks of low-income countries (a standing imperiled, however, by continuing political instability). Malaysia lies in-between its two neighbors.

Interestingly, however, this growth has not diminished the public's preoccupation with ethnoreligious divisions, but has raised new questions concerning justice and participation. Is one ethnic or religious group disproportionately benefiting from the fruits of economic growth? Have the rules of the economic game been unfairly rigged in favor of one segment of the population? Should market processes be complemented by programs of affirmative action to assist those populations not yet enjoying their fair share of the economic pie? These questions acquired even greater urgency in late 1997 and 1998, as East and Southeast Asia descended into economic crisis. The crisis reignited debates on economic policy and social justice; in Indonesia, it gave rise to urban violence in which Chinese storekeepers became the target of mob fury.

The anthropologist Clifford Geertz once remarked that national independence stimulated ethnoreligious sentiments in the new nations because it introduced "a valuable new prize," namely control of the state

(Geertz 1973a, 270). The same is true in spades of modern capitalist development. When the market works in such a manner as to distribute its benefits evenly across cultural divides, it can reinforce democratic ideals of civic harmony and citizenship. However, when market processes concentrate wealth and power in the hands of one ethnic, religious, or other cultural segment, they are just as likely to exacerbate tensions and undermine the civic accommodations on which long-term prosperity depends. Any effort to understand the new face of ethnoreligious pluralism in these three Southeast Asian societies, then, must assess the impact of market-making and nation-building on existing and emerging social divisions.

## "Civil" Society Revisited

It was against this twin background, then, of renewed attention to the problem of pluralism in democratic theory, and of growing interest in the impact of two generations of nation-building and market-making on the pluralist landscape of these countries (complicated by the aftershocks of the Asian economic crisis), that the authors in this book came together in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, during the first week of August 1999. The gathering was sponsored by the Ford Foundation as part of a research and training project I directed from 1998 to 2000 on, "Southeast Asian Pluralisms: Social Resources for Civility and Participation in Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia." Although three small teams continued carrying out interviews and ethnographic work into late 2000, the August conference was the final get-together for most participants in the three-country project.

The project involved five multidisciplinary research teams (two in Indonesia, two in Malaysia, and one in Singapore), each responsible for carrying out field interviews; it also involved a smaller number of independent paper writers. With the exception of me as project director, all research participants were recruited from the three project countries.[6] Hailing from sociology, political science, anthropology, and history, as well as a leading Muslim non-governmental organization in Indonesia, after some short training sessions the research teams set out in late 1998 and early 1999 to take the pulse of the new pluralism. They did so by conducting in-depth interviews in each country with one hundred to two hundred prominent actors in any of four social fields: religious organizations; business and labor; locally based non-governmental organizations (including the arts and media); and political organizations. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and subjected to content analysis. The independent paper writers also carried out a smaller number of interviews on their own, focused on a select segment of the pluralist population.

In examining the discourse and practice of pluralism across these four spheres, the project hoped to address a serious shortcoming in the current literature on citizenship and civic participation. As in Robert Putnam's otherwise exemplary study of civic traditions in modern Italy (Putnam 1993), that literature rightly asserts that "civil society" organizations—voluntary associations and relationships located in the public sphere between the family and the state (Hall 1995; Hefner 1998b)—can serve as a kind of "social capital" that contributes to the development of a public culture of citizenship and inclusive participation. Formal constitutions and elections are simply not enough, as Putnam cogently puts it, to "make democracy work." *Formal* democracy requires a societally based, *informal* politics of civility and participation if its institutions are to take hold.

These are important observations, consistent with the findings of the studies in this book. Much of the above-mentioned literature and much of the public activism surrounding the idea of civil society over the past ten years, however, proceeds from this sound premise to make two additional, more problematic, assumptions about the relationship of civil society to democratization. The first assumption is that civil society is a relatively homogeneous, undifferentiated thing, defined simply by the presence of self-organizing, "lateral" associations organized outside the family and apart from the state. The second assumption is that, whatever their location or purpose, civil society organizations are almost always "good" for democracy.

The problem with these assumptions is that, whether in Robert Putnam's work or in the statements of civil society activists (including many in Southeast Asia), nary a word is said about how civic associations may be cross-cut by deep ethnic, religious, or ideological divides. Unfortunately for those who place all of their democratic eggs in the civil society basket, history shows us time and time again that civic associations can be organized in a manner consistent with existing ethnoreligious divisions in society. History also shows that, rather than serving as social capital for democracy, at times these divisions can engender debilitating social rivalries that diminish rather than enhance the prospects for civic decency. To put the matter bluntly, then, civil society is not always "democracy-good." As with right-wing militias or the Klu Klux Klan in the United States, there is nothing at all unusual about certain "civil" organizations becoming, as far as citizenship and democracy are concerned, deeply "uncivil" in their behavior.

To state the matter in more sociological terms, the mere facts of structural "autonomy" and "self-organization" that theorists and activists celebrate as the essence of civil society do not in any sense guarantee that the attitudes or actions of civil society groupings will be inclusive or

democratic. As with the Christian and Muslim extremists active in religious violence in eastern Indonesia during 1999–2001, many associations that are "structurally" located in civil society are capable of promoting racism, chauvinism, or even violence (Hefner 1998b). Examples like these may be unpleasant, but, regrettably, they are not all that unusual. Contrary to a certain romantic mythology promoted on both the left and the right in the 1990s, "real-and-existing" civil societies are almost never homogeneous. Their constituent associations typically build on distinctions of ethnicity, language, religion, gender, and ideology operative in society as a whole. Inasmuch as this is the case, we shouldn't be surprised to see that the "social capital" created by civic associations may at times be deployed in sectarian projects or civility-destroying rivalries rather than toward making markets efficient or making democracy "work." To speak of a uniform "social capital" under such circumstances, then, is to assume that associational resources are a more or less universal currency always used as downpayment on liberal goods. Alas, history shows us that human relationships and organizations are responsive to a more varied array of passions and interests than these.[7]

But all is not lost with the concept of civil society. Public associations and interactions may indeed generate a "social capital" for civic peace and democratic development. However, if they are to do so, they must do more than display the familiar structural characteristics of "self-organization" and independence from the state. To play a democracy-enhancing role, the discourse and practice of people in public associations must be politically and culturally *civil*. What might this shamelessly overused term actually mean? Actors' words and actions can be regarded as "civil" if, even when used to take issue with others in the public arena, they signal respect for the rights of other citizens and thereby contribute to a public culture of participation premised on freedom of association, speech, and participation for everyone regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or class. Only when this *cultural quality* of "democratic civility" is added to the *structural reality* of civic association can we say that "civil society" has begun to do the job of strengthening democracy (Hefner 1998b, 2000a; cf. Benhabib, 1996; Habermas 1991; Kingwell 1995).

It was with this cautionary lesson in mind, then, that these Southeast Asian researchers set off to examine the discourse and practice of actors in different social spheres in these three countries. The researchers hoped to determine whether the words and actions of people in these associations are helping to build a new, "post-plural societies" culture of universal citizenship or are merely putting a new face on old segregations. Some associations and relationships in civil society, we realized, may help to

build bridges over troubled ethnoreligious waters; others may aim to tear them down. Our goal was to assess which associations are doing what, and what all this means for the prospects for multicultural peace and participation today.

The story that these authors are able to tell is not a simple one. Something of its complexity will be immediately apparent in the essays that follow. Rather than a neatly regimented "civil society" marching brightly toward democracy's triumph, all three of these countries are in the midst of an unfinished and deeply agonistic struggle to set the stage and write the scripts for participation in different public spheres. What makes the process particularly complex is that events are not everywhere working in tandem; political, economic, and religious developments can move in different directions, sometimes even contradicting each other. For example, in Malaysia during the 1980s and 1990s, state policies and market processes converged to bring about a more equitable distribution of wealth across ethnic divides. On the evidence of the Malaysian team's research, this has helped to mute ethnoeconomic tensions in the Malaysian middle classes, especially between Chinese and Malays (see the essays by Rahman Embong, Sumit, and Shamsul in this volume). Even as this progress has been made, however, at least some developments in the religious field have had a contrary influence. The influence of conservative Islamism in the Malay community has in some parts of the country diminished commensality across ethnic borders, especially between Chinese and Malays (Mutalib 1990, 101).

Even these facts do not yet convey the full complexity of influences on civic pluralism and public participation. Even in the same social field (the market, religion, etc.), there may be bitter contests among rival elites over how to deal with ethnoreligious differences. While some Malay Muslims want to use religion and the state to enhance their privileges to the detriment of non-Muslims, another wing in Malaysia's Islamic resurgence has taken issue with government policies that distinguish Malaysians on the basis of ethnicity. These latter Muslims have sought to promote an ethnically undifferentiated citizenship. In a similar manner, in Indonesia since the 1990s, there has been a bitter struggle between the mainstream Muslim leadership, which affirms equal rights for all and opposes those who would reduce non-Muslims to second-class status, and a tiny but well-financed Islamist minority vociferously—and at times even violently—opposed to equal rights for Christians and Chinese (see Hadiz and Sulistyo in this volume, and Hefner 2000a). The second and more general aim of the essays in this book, then, is to assess the dynamics of ethnoreligious pluralism across and within the four fields in each of these countries, and,

from there, determine what all this might mean for civic pluralism and democratic citizenship in years to come.

Although there are cross-cultural commonalities to the condition we call "modernity," and although "globalization" is indeed a force in our age, there is no teleology to history nor a single path of political modernization. Globalization does not bring with it an inevitable homogenization of culture and politics, because the "global ecumene" stimulates distinctive localizations and contestations (Hannerz 1996). This fact makes it more urgent than ever that we recognize the reality of contestive, alternative, or multiple modernities (Hefner 1998b; James 1995).

To begin to develop such an expanded sense of the age here in Southeast Asia requires that we stand back and reflect on the cultural and political history that has made this region what it is. In the remainder of this introduction, then, I review briefly the pre- and early colonial genealogy of pluralism in the insular region that was eventually to comprise Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia, in an effort to clear the analytic deck of certain misconceptions as to the nature of "premodern" or "traditional" Southeast Asia. Having set this historical stage, I then attempt to gauge the impact of postcolonial nation-building and market-making on these pluralist legacies. In the essay's conclusion, finally, I present a few preliminary reflections on the lessons of these Southeast Asian examples for pluralism and citizenship around the world.

## Flexible Ethnicity, Canopied Pluralism

When European galleons first sailed into the Malayo-Indonesian archipelago in the early sixteenth century, they found a world comprised, not of stagnant societies lost in traditional slumber, but a bustling region well into its second millennium of state rule and commercial dynamism. With its vast trade in rice, cloth, precious metals, and, most important, spices, the archipelago had long been, with the eastern Mediterranean, one of the world's great maritime emporia (Lombard 1990, 2: 16–30). It was largely in response to trade opportunities that the first states had arisen in the early centuries of the common era, as rulers responded to the trade by developing more centralized structures of power. It was this same commercial expansion, not foreign armies or settler colonists, that brought the world religions to the region. Hinduism and Buddhism came in the first centuries of the common era. Mass conversion to Islam began in coastal territories of the archipelago in the thirteenth century. Islam continued to spread in a wildfire pattern that followed the major trading routes until,

by the seventeenth century, it was the religion of most coastal states, as well as some but not the majority of the region's hinterlands.

When Europeans finally arrived in the archipelago in the early sixteenth century, the trade networks they discovered were not concentrated in one all-powerful kingdom, but were dispersed across this island expanse. The primary trade routes linked Muslim principalities in the east of the archipelago with larger ports in the west, including, most notably, the great entrepot of Malacca, "the Venice of Asia" (as early European visitors called it) on the southwestern edge of the Malay peninsula. From the perspective of a sociology of pluralism, the dispersed nature of the commerce is noteworthy for several reasons. First, although most of the region's mercantile ports were Muslim principalities, "The Southeast Asian trading city was a pluralistic meeting-point of peoples from all over maritime Asia" (Reid 1993, 66). Its visitors included Arabs, Chinese (Muslim and non-Muslim), Indian Muslims and Hindus, tribal animists, some Christians, and even the occasional visiting delegation from Japan (Lombard 1990, 2: 31–48; Thomaz 1993, 77–82).

Equally important, although Malacca enjoyed the greatest share, trade throughout the region was not dominated by any single kingdom or principality, but was based on the networked collaboration of many small states. Here, then, was a pattern of economic "pluricentrism" that, in its cultural diversity and mobility, resembled if anything the booming trade of the eastern Mediterranean in the early modern era (see Braudel 1966). Even more than was the case in the eastern Mediterranean, this organization was conducive to interethnic collaboration and rich cultural exchange. One noteworthy consequence of this fact appears to be that the Malayo-Indonesian peoples involved in the trade developed cultural traditions that showed strong family resemblances across great ethnic and political expanses. Whether in matters of dress, dance, coinage, gong music, social etiquette, or slavery and bondage, most of the societies in this vast archipelagic region drew on a Malayo-Indonesian civilizational reservoir.

There was an interesting linguistic dimension to this pattern of what we might call "permeable ethnicity." Once a local language spoken on the west coast of Borneo, the Malay peninsula, and the east coast of Sumatra, from the sixteenth century on Malay became the "pre-eminent language of scholarship, commerce, diplomacy, and religion" (Collins 1996, 23). In this it resembled Latin in medieval Europe, except that Malay was a popular oral as well as an elite literary language. Malay was spoken in virtually all of the major trading ports of Southeast Asia, including Thailand and Cambodia, although probably not Vietnam (Reid 1988, 233). The

ease with which the language spread says something important about the nature of pluralism in the region. Had ethnic divisions been strictly bounded or harshly oppositional, this linguistic diffusion would have been slower and less comprehensive. As is still the case today, rather than being harshly opposed, ethnic identities appear to have been canopied by a transethnic sense of Malayo-Indonesian civilization. As with European civilization in Christian Western Europe, of course, this multiethnic canopy did not prevent bitter political rivalries or even warfare between states. But it helps to explain how populations in disparate parts of the archipelago came to share so many similar cultural traits.

Religion was an integral part of this canopied ethnicity. Earlier, in the first millennium of the common era, Buddhism and Saivite Hinduism (with Vishnuite elements) had made their way to court centers throughout the region, becoming the preferred religion of state in most of the archipelago's kingdoms (Wolters 1970). Although Arab-Muslim traders made their way across island Southeast Asia as early as the seventh and eighth centuries, there was little settlement until the late thirteenth, when a Muslim town was established in north Sumatra as an entrepot for the trade with India and Arabia (Reid 1993, 133). Shortly thereafter, a Muslim presence was established in port towns along Java's north coast (Drewes 1968; Robson 1981). Ruling elites in the Malay peninsula were converted in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and those in coastal Sulawesi and much of the southern Philippines were won to the faith in the seventeenth century. As with the Malay language, the primary impetus for this conversion was not conquest or religious warfare, as had been the case in Islam's early expansion in Arabia and North Africa, but trade and interethnic intercourse. The growth of international commerce from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries moved large numbers of people out of localized societies into a multiethnic macrocosm, and Islam became an important support in the macrocosm's canopy (Reid 1993, 144; Robson 1981; cf. Hefner 1993a).

The cultural mobility and hybridity seen across this vast island region illustrates once again that its constituent societies were not changeless, traditional entities hermetically sealed from their neighbors. On the contrary, although the archipelago lacked the looming imperial presences seen in nearby India and China, most of its constituent societies drew on elements from a common, Malayo-Indonesian civilization. The flow of ideas and customs across the region also reminds us that, however much ethnicity everywhere builds on some elementary imagining of descent (Keyes 1976), ethnic traditions vary greatly in the vigilance of their "boundary maintenance" (Barth 1969) and their tolerance of cross-cultural imports.

For a comparative sociology of ethnicity and plurality, the "permeable ethnicity" seen in the archipelago certainly ranks as one of the most distinctive features of Malayo-Indonesian tradition. As Denys Lombard (Lombard 1990) has observed, the archipelago was one of the world's great "cross roads of civilizations." It developed a pattern of permeable and canopied ethnicity to go with it.

From the beginning, however, there were clear limits to this pattern of flexible ethnicity, an appreciation of which is vital if we are to understand the cultural divides that mark the region today. As Anthony Reid has written, the Southeast Asia (SEA) "region was manifestly better integrated by the warm and placid waters of the South China Sea" than were the Mediterranean, the Levant, and North Africa (Reid 1988, xiv). As this observation hints, however, the integration was above all a maritime phenomenon. Once one moved inland, roads were poor or non-existent, and the sheer density of jungles, swamps, and mountain ranges made inland travel more daunting than in most of Western Europe. In premodern times, population was also sparse—half that of Western Europe and one-sixth of that of China (Reid 1988, 15). As evidenced by items as varied as gong musical instruments or Hindu religious terms (such as the ubiquitous term for deity, *dewa*) among remote populations like the Karo Batak of Sumatra or the Toraja of interior Sulawesi, fragments from the Malayo-Indonesian cultural canopy made their way into archipelago hinterlands. However, the penchant of coastal kingdoms for slave-raiding and pillage in the interior ensured that the passage from coastal to inland or lowland to upland often coincided with a less open or permeable ethnic boundary (see B. Andaya 1993; Kipp 1993; Volkman 1985). Along with these troubled crossings came an often stronger sense of oneself as a people apart from those of the coasts or lowlands. Many of these divides remain rough points of cultural passage to this day (Hefner 1985; King 1993; King and Parnwell 1990; Russell and Cunningham 1989).

Under European colonialism, this stand-apart quality of highland and interior populations made them tempting targets for Christian missionaries. Both the Dutch and the British discouraged Christian missionization among established Muslim populations, recognizing that it might well undermine the "security and order" necessary for European enterprise (van Akkeren 1969; Hefner 1993b; Milner 1995: 71–76 ). As Dutch rule penetrated even remote hinterlands of the archipelago in the late nineteenth century, however, the state gave the green light to missionizing. It did so to aid in the territories' pacification, but also to carve out Christian enclaves in an otherwise continuous Islamic expanse (Hefner 1985; King 1993, 142; Kipp 1993). With their rule in Java secure after the

mid-nineteenth century, the Dutch even tolerated a modest mission presence among the nominally Islamized or *abangan* populations of the Javanese hinterland (Van Niel 1984, 83). Its impact was limited, however, not least of all by the perception among natives that Christianity was, in effect, a "Dutch" religion. Not coincidentally, the scale of Javanese conversion to Christianity was miniscule in the colonial era, but accelerated significantly after independence, when stewardship of local churches passed from European to Indonesian hands (Hefner 1993b; cf. Kipp 1993 for Sumatra).

The British adopted a similar policy on Christian conversion with tribal, non-Islamic populations in their Borneo territories (Andaya and Andaya 1982, 235; King 1993, 149–150). On the predominantly Islamic Malay peninsula, however, their actions were more cautious, delegating authority in matters of Islam and custom to local Muslim rulers.[8] Quite unlike the Dutch pattern in Java, the British actually strengthened the linkage of the Malay courts to Islam. The British "found it difficult to conceive of a ruler who did not rule," and so "elevated the sultans to positions of real as well as ritual authority . . . by effective centralization of power within each state and by emasculation of the independent authority of district chiefs" (Roff 1967, 14; Ackerman and Lee 1988, 175).

As they consolidated their power in the final years of the nineteenth century, the British not only accorded Malay rulers prerogatives in Islamic and customary matters, but provided them with the bureaucratic and legal machinery to implement their directives in a more systematic and invasive manner than ever before in Malay history. One reason native rulers chose to exercise these prerogatives so "liberally" was that this allowed them to fend off challenges to their authority, not least of all from reform-minded modernist Muslims known as *kaum muda*, "the young group." The "young group" Muslims were unimpressed by the idea that the interests of Islam were best served by aristocratic rulers (Roff 1967, 56–90; cf. Abdullah 1971). The young reformists had an only marginal effect on the sultans' power, however, and the colonial linkage of state and Islam was to have a profound influence on the postcolonial evolution of religious pluralism in Malaya.

Another exception to this archipelagic pattern of flexible ethnicity was the presence of immigrant ethnic groups who had a bounded sense of themselves relative to their Malayo-Indonesian neighbors. With their ideas of exclusive religious affiliation and racial superiority, the Europeans were at the extreme in this regard. In everything from the marriage of their daughters to the profession of their faith, the Europeans—with the partial exception of the mestizo-izing Portuguese, and perhaps some of the Dutch settlers in seventeenth-century Batavia (present-day Jakarta, see

Taylor 1983)—made themselves a people apart. When, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European domination was reaching its peak, this stand-apart quality was given even greater cultural leverage with newly ascendant notions of biocultural evolutionism and racial superiority (Gouda 1995; Stoler 1989).

However bizarre their rationalization of the practice, the Europeans were not alone in advocating ethnocultural segregation. Although in the premodern period many appear to have integrated relatively easily into indigenous society, as modern colonialism took hold Arabs, Indians, Chinese, and others among Southeast Asia's mobile minorities tended to hold themselves apart from native society, resisting the more porous pattern of Malayo-Indonesian ethnicity. Some did so, and do so still today, because they were "entrepreneurial minorities" (Dobbin 1996) whose very business success depended on tightly coordinated networks of partners and kin (see Hefner 1998a; Mackie 1998). Others held themselves apart for reasons of religion, marital custom, affinal exchange, patriarchal authority, or descent purity.

Among the Asian immigrants to Southeast Asia, the Chinese had a special position. They were the most numerous of the archipelago's "non-Malayo-Indonesian" minorities. At least after the coming of the Europeans, but probably well before, they were also the most economically powerful. Chinese had been important partners in the revival of trade that underlay the "Age of Commerce" in the archipelago from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries (Reid 1993, xiii). Some among the Chinese were already Muslim, and many in pre-European times were culturally close to archipelagic natives. One telling illustration of the earlier cultural fraternity is the fact that several of the Muslim "saints" (*wali*) identified as having brought Islam to Java were Chinese or part Chinese (de Graaf and Pigeaud 1984; Lombard 1990, 2: 42).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, the sheer scale of immigration by Chinese, their remarkable economic success, and their role as designated intermediaries for European enterprises, all reduced the incentives for Chinese to accommodate to Malayo-Indonesian ways (Skinner 1950, 1996; Reid 1996). In the Indies, Dutch colonial policy reinforced this segregationist tendency. The enclave societies established by the Dutch "provided a milieu that discouraged assimilation" (Reid 1993, 313). The Dutch collaborated with some of the more absolutist-minded local rulers, most notably in Java, to curb the activities of independent indigenous traders, transforming the multicentered trade into a monopoly licensed by native rulers to the Dutch. Because they were unlikely to make common cause with disaffected natives, and because they

had a long tradition of enterprise, Chinese were often given the lion's share of these Dutch-managed concessions. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Dutch also began to give tax farms to Chinese, including those central to the lucrative opium trade. The policy drove indigenous entrepreneurs even further out of commerce and widened the divide between native and Chinese (Carey 1984, 24; Rush 1990). Toward the end of the nineteenth century, as Europeans began to think of cultural differences as rooted in race, the Dutch crowned their policies on colonial pluralism with the introduction of laws that made it a crime to appear in public "attired in any manner other than that of one's ethnic group" (Rush 1990, 14; see also Gouda 1995, 168–173).[9] With extensive European assistance, the "plural societies" of Furnivall's age were taking shape.

British policy in the Straits Settlements (Penang, Malacca, and Singapore, all acquired at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; see Andaya and Andaya 1982, 106–124) and the "federated Malay states" (brought under British authority in the late nineteenth century) was less coercive than the Dutch on matters of ethnoracial segregation. But the British impact on ethnoreligious pluralism was no less far-reaching. With its vast forest expanses and relatively small Malay population (concentrated in the peninsula's few fertile rice-growing regions), the Malay peninsula offered easy access to rich jungle and mineral resources but an inadequate supply of labor. The British could have opted, of course, to force the Malays out of agriculture and into mine and plantation labor. But the political costs of such a strategy would have been high. The less expensive tack on which the British finally settled was to import hundreds of thousands of Indian and Chinese laborers for colonial enterprise. The result changed the face of peninsular society forever. By the early 1920s, Chinese outnumbered Malays in the peninsula. In 1931, Chinese in the Malay states subject to direct rule (the four so-called federated states: Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, and Pahang) comprised an astonishing 64 percent of the total population. (In the other, "unfederated" states, they represented 29 percent of the total; see Milner 1995, 227). The scale and rapidity of the migration, and the fact that it was regulated by the British, not Malay rulers, removed all remaining incentives for Chinese to accommodate to Malay ways.

In an essay on modern political change written a generation ago, Clifford Geertz observed that "A simple, coherent, broadly defined ethnic structure, such as is found in most industrial societies, is not an undissolved residue of traditionalism but an earmark of modernity" (Geertz 1973b: 308). Nowhere was this truer in the archipelagic world than in the Malay peninsula. In the span of just a few decades, Malays from around

the river valleys of the peninsula, who as late as the mid-nineteenth century may not have thought of themselves as having common ethnicity (Milner 1995, 14) and certainly did not think of themselves as a "nation" or people, came to refer to themselves in just such terms, as "Malays" (*orang Melayu*) and a "people" (*bangsa*).[10] As long as they were Muslim and willing to adopt Malay airs, even the Javanese and Sumatrans who migrated to the peninsula well into the twentieth century (and do so illegally still today) were identified as "Malay" in the newly homogenized ethnic structure (Roff 1967, 111). Meanwhile, Chinese and Indian immigrants created enclave communities in accordance with their own traditions and the colonially mandated division of labor.

As the assimilation of Javanese and Sumatrans to Malay ethnicity indicates, the fluid and permeable pluralism of the early modern archipelago world had not disappeared entirely. However, with European help, the divide between Malays and non-Malays was taking on the strongly oppositional quality canonized in Furnivall's "plural society."

## Alternative Pluralities

In the Malayo-Indonesian world, then, the Europeans did not create a plural society where previously there was none; nor were they, however, merely passive witnesses to a uniquely endogenous evolution. European colonial policy was central to the emerging politics and culture of pluralism in the region. The Europeans seized the commanding heights of an already plural civilization, expanding and expropriating its wealth while reorganizing and segregating its constituent Asian communities. They laid down the territorial boundaries within which all national leaders were to operate in the postcolonial era. In Muslim regions, they effected a partial secularization of the political order, in a manner that differed, however, from the Dutch East Indies to British Malaya or, in British Malaya itself, from the Malay sultanates to the direct-ruled Straits Settlements (Penang, Singapore, Malacca). Finally, in assigning different ethnic groups to specialized positions in everything from agriculture to the opium trade, the Europeans crystallized the most essential of supra-ethnic categories: the distinction between indigenous Malayo-Indonesian "children of the soil" (Malay, *bumiputera*, Indonesian, *pribumi*) and "non-indigenous" or immigrant Asians (Indians and, especially, Chinese).

This latter distinction was to be one of the most enduring categorical legacies of the colonial era. But it was also still far from stable in its meanings or policy implications. The binary opposition of indigenes to Chinese

was given substantially different weight by the three groups of reformers who appeared on the scene in the late colonial period intent on transforming native society and redefining the terms of its cultural pluralism.

The first group of native social reformers was that organized around the proponents of Islamic reform. To the degree that the Malayo-Indonesian world had had a dynamic, cosmopolitan component, it had always been grounded, not in its courts (least of all those, as in Java, oriented toward rent-seeking on agrarian estates), but in its bustling centers of maritime mercantilism. As the Europeans became politically dominant, the maritime classes became a ready target of colonial expropriation. The commercial middle class or *orang kaya* (lit., "rich" or "powerful" person; see Lombard 1990, 2: 144–150; Reid 1993, 114–23l) that had occasionally challenged aristocratic power and promoted more individualistic social styles, then, were the first victims of the European order. Although the Chinese and Indians developed an entrepreneurial middle class during colonial rule, the reappearance of a Malay or *pribumi* business class would have to wait until the late twentieth century.[11]

The archipelagic world of which the merchant class had been part, however, contained one sector that escaped the full weight of colonial controls: Islamic education and pilgrimage. The peace facilitated by European conquest allowed a great expansion in trade, internal migration, and steamship travel (especially after the middle of the nineteenth century). These three developments greatly increased the opportunities for Muslim students to make the pilgrimage (*haj*) to the holy land and to travel to religious schools around the archipelago or in the Middle East (Vredenbregt 1962). European enclave settlements like Batavia, Singapore, and Penang also provided a fertile breeding ground for the recently arrived ideas of Islamic reform. With their polyglot populations, detraditionalized hierarchies, competitive enterprise, printing presses, and European schools, these cosmopolitan environments proved congenial to the critical and individualistic spirit of Islamic reform (Milner 1995, 153–161; Roff 1967, 43). In Malacca as early as 1821, Christian missionaries lamented that " 'Mohammedism' " had 'much revived' since the arrival of the Christian missionaries" (Claudius Thomsen, cited in Milner 1995, 153). The regional and international network comprised of these Islamic institutions served as a channel for the dissemination of new religious ideals, and became one of the three nexuses around which a class of native reformers emerged intent on creating an alternative to the Europeans' "plural society" (Azra 1992). This Islamic nexus was oriented, not to the creation of a new "nation," but to the expansion and revitalization of the Islamic community of believers or *ummat*. As such, of course, it would

pose a special challenge to those in the colonial and postcolonial landscape who happened to be non-Muslim.

Another pole for the reconstitution of society was that of the native rulers and aristocracy. In the early phases of their colonization, both the Dutch and the British had preferred to retain as much as they could of the native aristocracy, if and when the local rulers showed a willingness to collaborate with European overlords. In enclave societies like Dutch Batavia, the British Straits Settlements, and other areas of direct rule, of course, European rulers saw little need to bother with concessions to native elites. Outside these enclaves, however, the Dutch and the British typically preferred to retain elements of the indigenous aristocracy so as to cloak foreign rule in native garb.

Over time, of course, the Europeans subjected native rulers to varying degrees of control, in a manner that reflected the changing requirements of enterprise and administration. Again, in the Malay peninsula, the British enhanced the rulers' authority in matters of Malay custom and Islam. Whereas the Dutch always viewed Javanese rulers as only superficially Islamic, the British viewed the Malay rulers and chiefs as "Muhammadan Monarchs" from the start. Consistent with this view, the British sought to maintain "intact, so far as was compatible with other aims, the internal structure of Malay authority and social organization" (Roff 1967, 11), even while effecting massive economic change in society as a whole.

This colonially leveraged linkage of royal and religious authority had a profound effect on the subsequent transformation of Malay-Muslim culture and, with it, Malaysian pluralism. The sultans' authority over Islamic education and organizations limited the opportunities for religious experimentation, with the result that the Malay kingdoms experienced less of the reformist ferment seen in the Straits Settlements or the Dutch East Indies. Colonial authorities colluded with native rulers against independent-minded Muslims. The 1904 Muhammadan Laws Enactment in British Malaya forbade public teaching on Islam without the sultan's approval in writing. An amendment to the enactment in 1925–1926 provided "severe penalties for anyone printing or publishing literature concerning the Islamic religion without the written permission of the Sultan in Council" (Roff 1967, 80). The associational vitality of Muslim civic organizations was also severely circumscribed. Although Qur'anic boarding schools (*pondok*) played an important role in Muslim social life in the Malay states of Kelantan, Terengganu, and Kedah (as well as across the border in Thailand, in the Malay-dominated province of Patani; see Madmarn 1999), they never developed the vast, para-institutional structure associated with such schools in the Dutch Indies (Dhofier 1999). Later

too, in the early twentieth century, religious schools in the peninsula showed little of the civic-organizational dynamism seen among Indies Muslims. In the Dutch colony, organizations like the modernist Muhammadiyah, founded in 1912 (Alfian 1989), and the neo-traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama, founded in 1926 (Feillard 1995), provided Muslims with powerful vehicles for social and religious reform. Only in the 1970s, with the rise of modernist student organizations like the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM, see Nagata 1984, 87–104), would Malaysia witness the emergence of Muslim organizations with a degree of political independence comparable to Indonesia's Muslim associations. Even then, however, with memberships numbering in the tens of thousands, the Malaysian organizations had a limited social penetration compared to their Indonesian counterparts, whose members number in the tens of millions.

The colonially reinforced linkage of ruler and religion, then, worked to give Malay-Muslim culture a more conservative, statist mien than was the case in the East Indies, and served to limit the development of a diverse religious public sphere. If the voices of Islamic reform were more restrained in British Malaya, the same is even truer of secular critics of Islamic traditionalism. Malaya heard little of the "full-blooded satirizing of shariah [Islamic legal-] mindedness" so widespread in late colonial Java (Milner 1995, 150).

The Malay rulers and their political proxies, then, exercised a far more decisive influence on public religious discourse than their counterparts in the Indies. Equally important, as this Malay elite came to see themselves in competition with immigrant Chinese and Indians, they gave their profession of the faith an even narrower, "ethnic" expression (Nagata 1984; Peletz 1998). To be Malay was *explicitly* marked as being Muslim; but it was also *implicitly* marked in opposition to Chinese and non-Muslim Indians. Malays came to use Islam, then, as an instrument of ethnic rivalry and state control. As Hussin Mutalib (1990) has argued, the tension between the ideals of ethnic exclusivity and universal Islam goes far back in Malay history. However, in the late colonial and postcolonial period, competition with non-Malays for control of the state exacerbated the tension, and led some Malays to "dispense with Islamic values" of a universalistic sort (Mutalib 1990, 1). Some visualized their faith as "an ethnic cocoon . . . protected by a veneer of religion" (Muzaffar 1987, 25).

The ability of native Malay aristocrats to cloak themselves in the garb of both Islam and ethnicity allowed them to position themselves in the front ranks of those vying for the few positions of influence offered to natives in the colonial state. The aristocrats' success also diminished the dynamism of the third of the native groupings hoping to reshape indige-

nous society, the popular nationalists. In his masterful *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, the historian William Roff notes that the aristocrats' criticism of the British "took the form of special pleas for continued Malay privilege, not of anti-colonial nationalism." He adds tellingly, "The group that stood to make the most immediate gain was the traditional elite itself" (Roff 1967, 236). The conservative alignment of *raja* and Malay identity had a restrictive influence on Malay nationalism. "The concept of a Malay 'nation,' " Roff observes, "existed less as an ideal polity than as a defensive community of interest against further subordination to or dependence on 'foreigners,' in particular against the domiciled Asian communities now so firmly entrenched in the states and settlements. . . . In this situation, the role in which the British were cast continued, paradoxically enough, to be that of guardian of Malay rights" (1967, 235).

Under the twin influences of aristocratic hegemony and ethnic rivalry, then, the nationalist movement in Malaya acquired a mono-ethnic, Malay-first emphasis rather than a multiethnic one. Threatened by Indian and, especially, Chinese immigration, the Malay elite saw little point in making common cause with Asian newcomers. In the 1910s, when the Chinese community first began to press for citizen rights, the Malay elite responded with fierce opposition (Roff 1967, 111). They did so again from 1946 to 1948, when, in the face of a British plan to provide equal citizen rights for Chinese and Indians, Malay politicians mobilized their constituency and succeeded in winning concessions institutionalizing Malay privileges (Omar 1993, 34–61). Many of these were later enshrined in the 1957 constitution granting Malaya independence (Mutalib 1990, 28). The constitution also preserved the arrangement whereby Malay sultans assumed primary responsibility for the administration of Islam.

There were always a few Malay nationalists who appealed to their fellows to open their movement to people of non-Malay and non-Muslim background. But the siege mentality among Malay elites doomed these inclusively pluralist efforts. Although Arab and Indian Muslims had been among the first to champion the plight of the Malays in the early years of the twentieth century, in the 1920s and 1930s Arabs and Indians were marginalized from the Malay-rights movement by Malays resentful of non-Malay leaders (Mutalib 1990, 21). When, in 1951, one of the founders of the dominant Malay political party, United Malays National Organization (UMNO), proposed to open the party to non-Malays, he was summarily driven out of the party (Mutalib 1990, 21).

For those few ardent Malay nationalists who sought the reconstitution of an independent polity along multiethnic lines, the more common rallying cry was, not unity with Indians and Chinese, but alliance with the

massive movement for nationalist liberation taking shape in the Dutch East Indies. Although popular in nationalist circles in Java and Sumatra, the idea of a federated, Malayo-Indonesian nation never made much progress in peninsular Malaya, except among a handful of (mostly) left-leaning Malays. Prior to the Second World War, Malay society was still predominantly rural and unschooled, and the hold of the aristocracy on the Malay population still strong. Only 10 percent of the population of the peninsula's three biggest towns was Malay. "The Malay, for the most part, remained a peasant cultivator" (Roff 1967, 30). Most urban, educated Malays were more preoccupied with their own socioeconomic marginality than with marching to the distant drum of Indonesian nationalism. The key concept around which aspiring nationalist leaders rallied, then, was not multiethnic nationalism, but *bangsa Melayu*, the "Malay people" (Omar 1993). Inasmuch as Chinese and Indians figured in this formulation, they did so largely negatively—as foreigners who threatened to marginalize Malays in their homeland.

## Indies Agonistes

The balance of power between native aristocrats and popular nationalists in the Dutch Indies differed dramatically from that in British Malaya. While the British had taken pains to maintain the appearance of Malay royal authority, Dutch policy in Java in the decades following the Dutch-Java War (1825–1830) had so emasculated royal authority that the nobility and their aristocratic allies (the *priyayi*; see Sutherland 1979) became identified in much of the public's mind with European domination. To speak of colonial or postcolonial Javanese courts as "exemplary centers" to which ordinary Javanese looked for their models of cultural excellence (as some Western specialists of Java still do), then, is to overlook the fact that by the mid-nineteenth century the courts' authority over much of the population had been massively compromised. Java's royalty did not enjoy anything comparable to the political and cultural hegemony of their counterparts in late colonial Malaya. As the Indonesian historian Sartono Kartodirdjo (1972) observed long ago, the rural leadership of Islamic boarding schools, as well as popularly based mystical leaders, were the primary beneficiaries of the aristocrats' declining legitimacy. In the twentieth century, these Muslim leaders would compete with popular nationalists to fill the vacuum left by the aristocrats' decline.

Outside Java, Dutch attitudes toward native rulers also varied more widely than did those of the British rule in the Malay peninsula. In some

regions, like Aceh, the native rulers were eliminated altogether (Bowen 1991). Elsewhere, as in Bali, a policy not unlike that of British "indirect rule" in the Malay states was implemented (Robinson 1995, 24–32). Whatever the similarities between Dutch and British rule in these territories, the postcolonial outcome was entirely different. When, in 1949, the Dutch attempted to negotiate a federal United States of Indonesia that kept many of their aristocratic allies in power, the proposal was bitterly and, in the end, successfully resisted by Indonesia's nationalist leadership (Ricklefs 1993, 233). After the independence war, the role of local aristocrats in the new government was formally abolished everywhere except in Yogyakarta in central Java, where the sultan had been a hero of the popular nationalist struggle. These events proved disastrous for the aristocratic stream in independent Indonesia. From this point on, aristocratic traditions might be mined for symbols of a neo-traditional patrimonialism, as was common under the dictatorial rule of President Suharto (1966–1998). Outside enclave-Yogyakarta, however, the aristocracy as an *institution* played almost no role in the struggle to define the new Indonesian nation.

The position of the popular nationalist leadership in the Dutch Indies on matters of ethnoreligious pluralism was also different from that of its Malayan counterpart. Indians had an only tiny presence in the Indies. Chinese were more numerous, but still comprised only about 2 percent of the population in 1900 (Mackie and Coppel 1976, 4) and only 2.7 percent by the time of Indonesia's independence. Despite their small numbers, the Chinese exercised a disproportionate influence on the colonial economy, and this imbalance led to heated debates among native nationalists as to how to deal with the Chinese problem. One of the most important antecedents to the nationalist movement, the Sarikat Islam (SI; Islamic Association), arose in central Java in the 1910s after bitter clashes between Muslim and Chinese merchants (Shiraishi 1990, 41–79). Tellingly—and again in marked contrast to the situation in British Malaya—in just a few years the movement foundered as it became factionalized between Muslim and left-wing popular nationalists. Elements of the latter were eventually expelled from SI and went on to form the Indonesian Communist Party. Although its leaders at times identified the Chinese with the ills of capitalism (Suryadinata 1979, 11) and disagreed over whether to recruit Chinese to the party (McVey 1965, 226–227), the Communist Party was to become one of the earliest and more consistent supporters of equal rights for Chinese after Indonesian independence (Suryadinata 1997, 36–38). Prior to Indonesian independence, Muslim and popular nationalist parties tended to exclude Chinese from membership. Chinese were

also conspicuous by their absence from the list of people invited by young nationalist leaders in 1928 to take the "Youth Oath" (*Sumpah Pemuda*) swearing allegiance to the goals of an independent and unitary Indonesia.

After independence, most of Indonesia's political parties, Muslim and popular nationalist, changed their official policies on Chinese membership. Chinese who were locally born and Indonesian-speaking, known in Malay-Indonesian as *peranakan* (lit., "local-born non-natives"), were officially welcomed into most parties.[12] Unofficially, however, there was still a good deal of resentment toward Chinese and suspicion of their national loyalties. "Pribumi leaders, with the possible exception of those associated with the defunct Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), perceive total absorption of local Chinese into the Indonesian population as the solution to the Chinese policy. . . . Pluralism has been applied by pribumi Indonesian leaders to their fellow pribumis, but not to the Chinese minority" (Suryadinata 1992, 4).

Consistent with unofficial attitudes, Indonesian authorities periodically implemented vigorously discriminatory policies against Chinese. In the early 1950s, there was a small, corruption-ridden program of government licensing and export controls devised in response to Chinese commercial dominance (McVey 1992, 11; Suryadinata 1992, 130–132). The regulations brought an entire class of indigenous license-holders into existence, who illegally "rented" their permits to Chinese businesspeople in silent partnerships known as "Ali-Baba" arrangements. The practice continued in a different guise under the Suharto regime, when the largest of the so-called *cukong* (wealthy Chinese partners of indigenous officials) were tethered even more tightly to Suharto and the New Order leadership (Mackie 1992; Robison 1986, 272; Suryadinata 1992, 142). In 1959, the minister of trade in the Sukarno cabinet, an official from the Islamic Nahdlatul Vlama (NU) party, issued a regulation banning foreign-born Chinese retailers from rural areas and requiring they transfer their business assets to Indonesian citizens (Robison 1982, 86–88; Suryadinata 1992, 135). Although officially the regulation did not affect Chinese-Indonesian citizens, and although enforced in a haphazard manner, the regulation was symptomatic of the way in which economic nationalism in Indonesia typically took on anti-Chinese overtones.

Although in 1946, at the height of the independence struggle when they needed to court Chinese support, nationalist leaders had announced a Citizen Act extending equal citizen rights to all Chinese born in Indonesia, during the 1950s the republican government reversed course, tightening residence rules and requiring Chinese Indonesians to actively repudiate Chinese citizenship (Suryadinata 1992, 113–115). The resulting

lack of legal clarity created rich opportunities for unscrupulous government officials to exact cash payments from Chinese.

The changing winds of elite opinion in Jakarta also led to policies on Chinese culture and religion far more repressive than those in nearby Malaysia. There had been a great expansion of Chinese-medium schools in the late 1940s, some of which had actually begun to "re-Sinify" Indonesian-born *peranakan* (many of whom could not, and still today cannot, speak Chinese). In 1957, however, the minister of defense banned Indonesian citizens from attending "alien" schools, thereby abolishing Chinese as the medium of instruction in schools serving Indonesian Chinese (Suryadinata 1992, 151). The last remaining Chinese-medium schools were closed in late 1965, in the aftermath of a failed left-wing officers coup; Suharto propaganda blamed the coup on the Communist Party and Chinese. In 1974, the Suharto government imposed a ban on Chinese language instruction in *any* Indonesian school; literature and signs in Chinese characters were also forbidden (Suryadinata 1992, 158). In striking contrast to the Indonesian example, and despite some restrictive regulations (such as the requirement that they also teach Malay), in nearby Malaysia Chinese-medium schools flourished. So too did the use of Chinese language and characters in public signs and writing (Tan 2000; Tang 2000).

In all these matters, we see a fundamental contrast between Malaysia and Indonesia on the issue of postcolonial pluralism. The idea of differentiating citizenship along ethnic lines, especially as regards indigenes versus Chinese, was discussed at the time of the Indonesia's founding. But an exuberantly republican ideology, as well as the exigencies of anticolonial mobilization, resulted in policies that were officially inclusive and non-discriminatory. As long as Chinese Indonesians were willing to renounce their Chinese citizenship, Sukarno declared, they should be welcomed as citizens. Similarly, although a Department of Religion was established in 1946 and Indonesia's many indigenous religions were not included among those that citizens could profess, the popular nationalist community campaigned successfully against the establishment of Islam as the state religion and against the application of Islamic law to Muslim citizens. Until 1966, then, most Chinese Indonesians were quietly able to profess the religion of their choice, even though the Department of Religion did not provide special resources for their religion.

However, the economic and political crises of the 1950s and 1960s, the continuing economic dominance of Chinese, and, perhaps most important, the lack of a settled consensus among the Indonesian elite on the terms for citizenship and constitutional governance all ensured that

Indonesia was tragically prone to periodic "foundational" crises. During these periods—the elections of the 1955, the abolition of parliamentary democracy in 1958–1959, the anti-communist massacres of 1965–1966, and the final months of the Suharto dictatorship—all of the constitutional and ideological grounds of the state were put in question. Worse yet, in an effort to outflank rivals, some among the ruling elite were tempted during these crises to make sectarian appeals to ethnicity, race, or religion to advance themselves against enemies. Today, at the beginning of a new millennium, Indonesia is again in the midst of one of these foundational crises. The result is that the sweet promise of inclusive and egalitarian citizenship expressed in so much of Indonesia's nationalist heritage has yet to be realized.

Ethnoreligious issues were, of course, central to political debates on citizenship and constitutionalism in Malaysia. Moreover, these issues have typically been resolved in a manner that, unlike Indonesia, officially differentiates citizens along ethnic and religious lines. The United Malays National Organization (UMNO) was created in 1946 in opposition to British proposals to grant expanded citizen rights to long-resident Chinese. During 1963–1965, the question of Malay rights and Chinese citizenship scuttled efforts to bring Chinese-dominated Singapore into the Malaysian federation. This failure was testimony to the determination of the Malay elite to use ethnically differentiated citizenship as the groundwork for promoting their party and their (Malay) people. The great irony here is that, whatever its democratic shortcomings, the very strength of this formula, and the security of the UMNO hold on government, have allowed Malaysia to steer clear of the foundational pitfalls that have plagued Indonesia, and, slowly but surely, to make progress in ethnic relations.

## Ethnically Differentiated Citizenship

In British Malaya, then, the colonial order stimulated a three-sided competition among aristocrats, Islamists, and popular nationalists. But there was little doubt in the late colonial period as to which of these cultural streams was to be dominant. Royalty and aristocrats controlled the top leadership posts in Malay political organizations. In the postwar period, they assumed the lion's share of key posts in UMNO, the party that has led the coalition that has ruled Malaysia since independence. Only with the election of Mahathir Mohamad (a non-aristocrat) as prime minister in 1981 was aristocratic dominance seriously challenged. Mahathir would go

on to curb aristocrat privileges, shifting the balance of power in UMNO away from the old aristocracy to the new Malay middle class (Milne and Mauzy 1999, 30–39).

There was little doubt, too, as to the nature of citizenship in an independent Malaysia. It was to be an asymmetrically differentiated citizenship, which accorded basic citizen rights to Chinese and Indians in exchange for special legal, political, and economic rights for Malays. Under the terms of the constitutional agreement worked out in 1957, Chinese and Indians who met certain residency requirements were given citizenship rights in exchange for accepting Malay dominance in politics and culture. Islam was declared the religion of state, but, not without some ambiguity, freedom of religion was promised for the followers of other religions as well. Malay was declared the national language, but Chinese-medium schools, newspapers, and signs were also still allowed. The constitution's Article 153 also had special, if vague, provisions for Malay educational scholarships, land reservations, and set-asides in the civil service and military (Milne and Mauzy 1999, 16).

Consistent with these emphases, and in striking contrast to Indonesia, all of the successful political parties in Malaysia have been "constructed along ethnic lines" (Milne and Mauzy 1999, 16). Malaysian citizenship, then, was premised not on universal individual rights but on what political theorists have come to refer to as "differentiated citizenship" (Parekh 1991, 192, 772), in which group rights are recognized alongside individual rights. Unlike the Western European "consociational democracies" to which the Malaysian system is sometimes compared (Lijphart 1977), however, the group rights accorded Malays, Chinese, Indians, and other ethnic minorities are distributed in unambiguously asymmetrical fashion. In theoretical terms, as Milne and Mauzy (1999, 18) have observed, the Malaysian system is a kind of "hegemonic consociationalism" (cf. Lijphart 1977, 5), in which Malays enjoy constitutionally sanctioned advantages over non-Malay citizens.

The constitution's vaguely worded provisions for Malay affirmative action were to become the basis for far more ambitious programs of Malay affirmative action after the disastrous "race" riots of May 1969. This was the one moment in its independence history at which Malaysia seemed on the verge of a foundational crisis of Indonesia-like proportions. According to official figures, almost two hundred people died in the violence, the majority of them Chinese. The violence was prompted by tensions between Malays and Chinese on the heels of a national election in which opposition parties identified with non-Malay interests had made gains at the expense of the ruling National Alliance.

The most important postriot initiative was the formulation of the New Economic Policy (NEP). The NEP sought to tackle the economic imbalance between Malays and Chinese. (Forming about 8 percent of the national population, the bulk of Malaysian Indians worked on agricultural estates during the colonial period and were as poor or poorer than Malays. But Indians were excluded from affirmative action programs.) In its first years the program's educational and business set-asides so antagonized some Chinese that it prompted immigration by a few of the best and brightest of Chinese youth. Even in the Malay community, critics charged that the program's contracts and subsidies were being unfairly channeled to the UMNO elite and not to the Malay poor or deserving businesspeople (see Gomez and Jomo 1997). This led, in turn, to widespread accusations that the new Malay capitalism, like that of the Suharto-linked elite in Indonesia, was an "ersatz capitalism" that would wither on the vine if ever state protections were removed (Yoshihara 1988).

From the start, however, the UMNO leadership made no secret of its ambition, not merely to reduce Malay poverty, but to bring a new class of Malay capitalists into existence. Cronyism appears to have been rampant, but there can be little doubt that the NEP succeeded in reducing Malay poverty and achieving impressive educational gains for Malays. Between the early 1970s and 1993, the Malay middle class rose from 18 percent to 28 percent of the population, and the industrial working class tripled from 7.8 percent. During roughly the same period, the agricultural population (predominantly Malay) fell from 65.2 percent to 33.5 percent (Milne and Mauzy 1999, 62). The NEP had the good fortune, of course, of coinciding with the Asian economic boom of the 1970s and 1980s. It is also true that it was plagued by sufficiently high levels of cronyism to bring about the spectacular collapse of several large investment schemes. Its failings acknowledged, however, the program succeeded in diminishing ethnic inequalities in wealth. During roughly the same period, inequalities between *pribumi* and Chinese in neighboring Indonesia were getting worse. Indeed, compared to similar programs in other countries, and evaluated purely in terms of its impact on ethnic economic imbalances (not fairness or freedom from cronyism), the NEP ranks as one of the more successful programs of ethnically based affirmative action of the late twentieth century.

One intriguing, if especially controversial, feature of the program has been its impact on ethnic relations. As noted above, the program in its early years exacerbated tensions between Malays and Chinese (Muzaffar 1987, 24). As time went on, however, Chinese with strategic ties to UMNO and the Malay elite did well as NEP business partners, and the attitude of

much of the Chinese elite changed (Gomez 1999, 153; Searle 1999). Given the impressive breadth and duration of Malaysia's economic boom, the Chinese middle class has prospered too, although this has not prevented many ordinary Chinese and Indians from feeling they are a lesser category of citizen. Nonetheless, although the findings must be regarded as tentative, the essays by Rahman Embong, Sumit, and Shamsul in this volume, as well as other studies (Embong 1999; Searle 1999), suggest that the rise of the so-called "new Malay" middle class (*Melayu baru*) has been accompanied by a lessening of ethnic tensions, especially between Malays and Chinese. By comparison with contemporary Indonesia, it is notable that there is a significantly lesser incidence of minority-baiting in Malaysia. Indeed, in the late 1990s, there were signs that some in the highest echelons of the ruling elite were contemplating stepping back from the "Malay-first" emphases of the NEP toward a new emphasis on a more symmetrical pattern of multiethnic citizenship.

The latter transition is preliminary to say the least, however, not least of all because recent changes in government, the economy, and society seem potentially at variance with this trend. The religious field, for example, has seen a notable relaxation of ethnic and religious borders between the two dominant minorities, the Indians and Chinese. Some individuals in each of these ethnic communities have migrated out of old ethnoreligious enclaves into new, multiethnic religious movements and denominations; the most prominent of these interethnic religious associations are charismatic Christians and Hindu-inspired mystics like the Satya Sai Baba movement (Ackerman and Lee 1988). Equally important, even among Chinese and Indians who affiliate with the old, ethnically segregated religious organizations, state policies in favor of Malays and Islam have helped to create an "undefined sense of solidarity . . . that they are not Muslims" (Ackerman and Lee 1988, 5).

Although there is increasing commensality between Chinese and Indians, however, the Islamic resurgence and state set-asides have fortified the Malay versus non-Malay divide. The fact that a major stream in the Islamic resurgence has been colored by ethnic chauvinism has "inhibited interethnic and interreligious relations and widened social distance between communities" (Mutalib 1990, 101). In many towns, the resurgence at first decreased the incidence of everyday civilities like greetings or the sharing of meals (see also Anwar 1987).[13] Nonetheless, as the essays by Shamsul, Rahman Embong, and Sumit in this volume testify, there is another stream in contemporary Malay culture and the Muslim resurgence. This stream emerged only in the 1990s, and any estimate of its future influence, therefore, must be tentative. Nonetheless, a segment of the Muslim middle class

today seems to be experimenting with a less exclusive sense of their faith and a more multiethnic vision of market and nation.

Again, however, the public spheres that make up a society do not always develop in tandem, and the general trend in Malaysian society is as yet unclear. Whether the lowering of ethnic barriers seen in some societal fields will continue depends on, among other things, ongoing political contests. Not the least of these is the rivalry between the Mahathir government and the political opposition dominated by the theologically conservative Islamist party known as PAS (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, or the All-Malaysia Islamic Party). Although founded in the 1950s as a populist party only slightly more Islamic than UMNO, in the 1980s PAS veered in a more theologically conservative direction under the leadership of a new generation of "young Turk" (as they were known) militants (Muzaffar 1987, 55–66). Populist in its economics and vehemently opposed to corruption, PAS is nonetheless deeply conservative in matters of Islamic law and *ulama* (Muslim scholar) leadership of the party and government. As Zainah Anwar's essay in this volume explains, PAS advocates the establishment of an Islamic state, based on a strict application of Islamic law, including harsh *hudud* penalties (such as amputation of limbs) for designated criminal acts, the death penalty for Muslim apostates, and severe limitations on the rights of women in matters of divorce, inheritance, and court testimony (see Ismail 1995; Othman 1994). Although it tends not to play up the matter, the party is also committed to the conservative Islamist notion that citizen rights in a Muslim-dominated state should be differentiated by religion. Among other things, this means that, as "protected minorities" (*dhimmi*), non-Muslims must accept Muslim dominance or face prosecution as enemies of Islam (see Awang 1994).

Although most of these theoretical notions have little direct appeal among the Malay public, disaffection with UMNO and Prime Minister Mahathir, not least of all after the sacking of the popular vice premier Anwar Ibrahim in 1998 (see the Shamsul essay in this volume), may continue to put wind in PAS's sails, giving it a political influence disproportionate to its ideological resonance in society. In this instance, rivalries in the political field are affecting culturo-ideological developments in the religious field. Recent events have boosted the influence of theologically conservative Islamic organizations committed to ideals of asymmetrical citizenship. This has occurred at precisely the same time that, as a result of (among other things) improvements in the economic field, some in the mainstream Malay leadership appear inclined to downplay the Malay versus non-Malay divide.

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has not hesitated to exploit non-Muslim fears of conservative Islam and ethnic violence. During the election campaign of November 1999, the prime minister used the publicity surrounding anti-Chinese riots in Indonesia to remind Chinese that, without his leadership and the NEP, violence like that seen in Indonesia might well have occurred in Malaysia. At the same time, however, people who know the prime minister (and whom I interviewed in October 1999) point out that Mahathir now believes that it is important to take Malaysia beyond its manufacturing base toward an information-based, "knowledge economy." To achieve this goal requires the enthusiastic participation of Chinese Malaysians. Recognizing this, the prime minister believes measures must be taken to reassure Chinese that they are full partners in the Malaysian nation. On several recent occasions, Mahathir has even spoken of the need to build a multiethnic "Malaysian nation" (*bangsa Malaysia*), a notion that implies equality among Malays, Chinese, Indians, and others. (In subsequent statements, the prime minister made clear that this symmetrical citizenship is something to be achieved in the future, ideally by 2020.) As with his newly initiated Malaysian Multimedia Supercorridor (designed to promote software and multimedia industries), Mahathir has also gone out of his way to recruit highly skilled Malaysian Chinese to new programs, including some who had previously migrated to California's Silicon Valley.

In this same regard, it is interesting to note that, at the beginning of the Asian economic crisis in 1997–1998, Mahathir appealed to Malaysian Chinese to purchase shares in Malay-owned businesses threatened with bankruptcy. The contrast with Suharto of Indonesia could not be more striking. In the final months of 1997 and early 1998, Suharto and his children responded to the growing economic crisis by accusing Chinese Indonesians (as well as "Jews," the CIA, and the Vatican; see Hefner 2000a) of having masterminded the economic crisis so as to bring Suharto down. They did so, this propaganda claimed, because Suharto is a Muslim and because these "enemies of Islam" do not want a majority-Muslim country to become strong. In February 1998, as Indonesia's economic crisis worsened, Suharto proxies also accused Chinese shopowners of driving up prices by hoarding staple commodities. In the same month, Suharto's minister of interior, Syarwan Hamid, referred to the Chinese as "rats" who were destroying the nation. In the weeks that followed, regional government officials joined this shockingly racialist campaign, accusing Chinese storeowners of manufacturing the food shortage. A short time later, as if on cue, Indonesia witnessed incidents of urban

violence in which hapless Chinese storeowners were the targets of cruel crowd violence.

All this is to say that Indonesia in the late 1990s and 2000 was in the throes once more of a foundational crisis of citizenship and governance. In this instance, the shameless efforts of old regime elites were jeopardizing the great pluralist achievements in the religious field. There, just prior to Suharto's fall, Indonesia had seen the emergence of the world's largest movement for a civil-democratic Islam.

## Religion and Citizenship

Although through the din of recent anti-Chinese racialism it may be difficult to remember, the question that has animated citizenship debates in independent Indonesia has less frequently focused on whether citizen rights should be differentiated by ethnicity, as in Malaysia, but whether they should be differentiated by religion. And the majority opinion during the first fifty years of the republic was a firm, if still contested, "no."

In the months preceding the Indonesian declaration of independence on August 17, 1945, Indonesian leaders worked furiously to formulate a tentative constitution for their planned republic. The most contentious issue on which the leaders could not agree had nothing to do with Chinese or indigenous rights, but with whether the state should impose different rights and duties on citizens according to their religion. The question was raised in relation to the so-called Jakarta Charter, a proposed amendment to the Indonesian declaration of independence (not included in the declaration's final version) that required the state to implement Islamic law (*shariah*) for all Muslim citizens (Feillard 1995, 42). Supporters of the charter presented it in purely religious terms, as a right and duty of Muslims to conduct their religion as its laws specify; the issue was neither explicitly nor implicitly motivated by a desire to assert *pribumi* rights over Chinese. In the 1950s, the issue was revived again, this time through a debate in the Constituent Assembly that pitted proponents of an Islamic state against an odd alliance of military conservatives and left-leaning popular nationalists committed to non-confessional nationalism (Lev 1966).

Although initially their electoral support was equal to that of their nationalist and communist rivals, Muslim parties who advocated an Islamic state lost ground to popular nationalists and communists during the final years of Sukarno rule. The single greatest cause of their decline was an impressive campaign of agrarian mobilization conducted by the

Indonesian Communist Party in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Mortimer 1974, 276–328). Angered by the communist success and their own marginalization, Muslim parties collaborated with the Indonesian military in the violent destruction of the Communist Party in the aftermath of a failed left-wing officers coup on October 1, 1965. As reward for this cooperation, the Muslim leadership looked to the military-dominated "New Order" government to revive the Jakarta Charter and, with it, introduce religious differentiation into the terms of Indonesian citizenship.

However, the conservative military nationalists around General Suharto were adamantly opposed to any such concession to Muslim interests. In fact, during the first twenty-some years of his rule, Suharto was a staunch promoter of a conservative interpretation of the state ideology known as the "Five Principles" or Pancasila (Ramage 1995). The Pancasila steers clear of any recognition of Islam as the state religion. However, at least as interpreted by Suharto's proxies, the Pancasila also rejects the Western liberal idea that religion is merely a matter of private personal belief. In so doing, it opens the door to a small but important measure of citizen differentiation by religion.

Under the Suharto regime, the state recognized five national religions—Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, and Buddhism—and required all citizens to profess one. From kindergarten to college, students were (and are still) required to study the tenets of their religion (as interpreted by state-appointed experts) for two hours a week in government classrooms. An individual's religious identity is also one of the few items of personal information recorded on the identity cards that all citizens carry. Complicating this pattern of citizen differentiation by religion was Suharto's inconsistent conduct on religious matters. However pluralist the Pancasila to which he claimed allegiance, in practice Suharto skillfully exploited religious tensions, pitting one religious community against another. This left a bitter legacy of state meddling in religious matters, and, by posing religious communities against each other, left relations among communities deeply troubled.

As the essays by Hermawan Sulistyo and Vedi Hadiz in this volume indicate, in the final years of his rule, Suharto dropped all pretense of neutrality and actively courted ultraconservative Muslims who, just a few years earlier, had figured prominently in the opposition (see also Hefner 2000a, chs. 5–7). Suharto's courtship of this small, hard-line community represented a decisive break with his earlier support for Javanist mysticism and Pancasila pluralism *against* Muslim organizations (Ramage 1995). This tactical shift was motivated by the president's determination to undermine the growing democratic opposition by splitting it along religious lines.

This strategy was initially devised in 1995 by conservative Muslim intellectuals in think tanks established by members of the first family and a small, "green" (i.e., Islamist, see the Sulistyo essay in this volume) faction of the military. To achieve this goal, Suharto's supporters also had to discredit Muslim members of the pro-democracy opposition, including leaders of Indonesia's two largest Muslim organizations, Abdurrahman Wahid of Nahdlatul Ulama and Amien Rais of Muhammadiyah.

Ultimately, of course, Suharto's strategy failed; democratic Muslim leaders were at the forefront of the multireligious alliance that drove Suharto from power in May 1998. Unfortunately, Suharto's departure changed little in regime culture itself. Despite new press freedoms and the courage of a few civilian and military officials, to this day most of the state remains unreformed. Sadly, as Sulistyo's essay hints, recent evidence indicates that hard-liners from the regime have also been behind some of the outbreaks of ethnic and religious violence that have plagued Indonesia since Suharto's fall (Hefner 2000b; Tomagola 2000).

The fate of interethnic and interreligious civility in Indonesia will greatly depend on efforts to dissipate this bitter legacy and forge a new consensus on citizenship and pluralism in the post-Suharto era. The elections of June 1999, the first free and fair national elections since 1955, were extremely hopeful in this regard. The results indicated that the country in the 1990s had experienced *a great convergence toward a democratic and pluralist center*. Whereas, in the 1950s, the majority of Muslims advocated the formation of an Islamic state, in the 1999 elections the overwhelming majority voted for pluralist parties.

Most Indonesians, and most Indonesian Muslims, appear comfortable with some measure of state support for religion in public life. In this sense they appear more "civil-pluralist" than "liberal" in their understanding of the relationship between religion and democracy (Hefner 1998b). It is helpful to remember, however, that most European democracies have historically allowed, and still allow, limited state support to religious organizations (see Monsma and Soper 1997). The American and French patterns of vigorous "disestablishment" are, in fact, more the exception than the Western democratic rule. As long as such state support is equally available to all confessions, there is nothing intrinsically undemocratic about it. Indeed, as Tariq Modood has recently observed, the aim of a democratic multiculturalism should not be to drive religious actors or discourses from the public square, but to work for "the inclusion of marginal and disadvantaged groups, including religious communities, in public life" (Modood 2000, 192). The key thing as far as the public sphere is concerned is that religious actors respect the ground rules of democratic

citizenship. This means extending freedoms of speech and association to all citizens, including dissident members in one's own community.

The critical issue as far as contemporary Indonesia is concerned is that the great majority of Muslims demonstrated through their voting that they see their religion as thoroughly consistent with democracy and constitutionalism. Most reject, too, political reforms that would relegate non-Muslims to the status of second-class citizens. Unfortunately, however, it is precisely because of this lack of "primordial" divides that defenders of the ancien régime have had to work so hard to turn local tensions into raging national battles. The murder of Muslim preachers in eastern Java (see the Sulistyo essay in this volume, and Hefner 2000a) and the skillfully orchestrated bombing of some fifteen churches on Christmas Eve 2000 (an event that occurred as this book was in press) illustrates the callous determination of those who would poison inter-religious relations so as to turn back political reform.

The stakes in this contest are high. The violence threatens not only Indonesia's proud tradition of national citizenship, but also that which has been most remarkable in the cultural heritage of Indonesian Muslims: their spirited commitment to the dream of a multiethnic and multireligious nation. Elite-instigated developments in the political field are running roughshod over progress toward civility and tolerance in religion. In light of the enormity of Indonesia's crisis and the resources of ancien régime extremists, the long-term outcome of this struggle is far from clear.

## Singapore's Search for Nation

Although linked during its colonial history to peninsular Malaya, today Singapore's political and cultural situation differs significantly from that of its Malaysian neighbor, and all the more from Indonesia. Whereas Malaysia and Indonesia are predominantly "indigenous" and Muslim, Singapore is an overwhelmingly Chinese (77 percent) society in which no religion enjoys a hegemonic influence.[14] After the aborted attempt at federation with Malaysia (1963–1965), the Singapore elite, under the guidance of President Lee Kuan Yew, scrambled to ensure the cultural and economic survival of their resource-poor country. Although Lee and the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) are often portrayed in the Western media as authoritarian bullies, and although "some seriously anti-democratic legislation" has been put in place by the PAP, "the legitimacy and longevity of the PAP government from 1959 to present is built on a strong ideological consensus with the people around 'economic pragmatism'"

(Chua 1995, viii). What Francis Kok Loh Wah in his essay on Malaysia in this volume calls "developmentalist ideology" has for much of Singapore's postcolonial history enjoyed significant legitimacy, as a result of the populace's concern for their country's survival. Today, however, this same ideological legacy may be working to create citizen aspirations unintended by the PAP leadership, and considerably more complex than developmentalism alone.

The ruling party in Singapore has promoted a policy on citizenship and ethnoreligious pluralism strikingly different from that of its two neighbors. Reacting to the failed effort at federation with Malaysia in 1965 (which broke down over the question of Malay communal privileges), the PAP leadership was at first unstinting in its emphasis on meritocracy and ethnically undifferentiated citizenship. Consistent with its origin in the 1950s as an alliance of British-educated professionals and left-leaning social democrats (the latter marginalized after Lee Kuan Yew's consolidation of power in the early 1960s), early on the PAP had promoted secularist policies on religion and citizenship (Tamney 1996, 25). In the early 1960s, for example, the PAP leadership rushed through legislation aimed at privatizing ethnic and religious affiliations. Despite subsequent shifts in party policy, the "Religious Harmony" bill passed in 1990 preserves key features of this policy, prohibiting, for example, the use of religion for political ends and mandating severe penalties for anything deemed "extremist" (see Siddique in this volume, and Chua 1995, 26). On matters of ethnicity, too, PAP policies at first resembled those the party applied to religion. In 1972, Lee Kuan Yew's advisers had described the Chinese extended family as incompatible with modern market rationality, because (he claimed) it frustrates the development of individual initiative. Even as late as 1981 Lee had described Singaporeans as individualistic achievers whose background as immigrants had led them to throw aside the collectivist shackles of Chinese tradition (Chua 1995, 27).

With the growing affluence of Singapore society, and in the face of middle-class restlessness over government controls, however, Lee and his aides appeared to have second thoughts in the late 1970s and early 1980s about this emphasis on individualistic merit to the exclusion of communal affiliation. PAP officials began to speak of individualism as a Western notion corrosive of "Asian values." They also retreated from their earlier emphases on ethnic integration, English-language education, and non-communalism. After 1979, the government's "Speak Mandarin" campaign promoted Mandarin rather than English as the mother tongue for Chinese-Singaporeans. Around the same time, the government began to emphasize communal self-help rather than individual

achievement or (least of all) state welfare as the preferred means of dealing with poverty, crime, and drug abuse (Li 1998, 165–169; Tamney 1996, 93).

In 1979, the PAP leadership also proposed reforms to public education that would allow moral educational curricula into public classrooms. The program the government eventually devised aimed to teach basic "Religious Knowledge" in an effort "to provide the cultural ballast to withstand the stresses of living in a fast changing society" (*Straits Times,* March 15, 1979, cited in Chua 1995, 27). Since Singapore's population includes Indians (Muslim and Hindu) and Muslim Malays as well as Christians, Buddhists, and religiously unaffiliated Chinese, the school-based "Religious Knowledge" (RK) program stipulated that members of each community were free to choose a religious track consistent with their own convictions (Tamney 1996, 25). Seven tracks were made available for students: Protestant, Catholic, Buddhist, Confucian, Hindu, Islam, and Sikh.

At this stage Lee and his advisers seemed confident that the world religions all have "a common core of ethical values, which would undermine the negative values associated with hippyism" and other pernicious Western habits (Tamney 1996, 26). Most in the PAP leadership are also said to have expected that, despite its recognition of seven religious tracks, the RK campaign would give the biggest boost to the conservative, étatist Confucianism popular in PAP circles. However, to the government's surprise, the majority of students enrolled in RK programs opted not to follow the Confucian track. The greatest number went into Buddhist (44 percent) and Bible (21 percent) studies. Some 18 percent chose Confucian studies, just slightly more than the number who chose Islam (13.3 percent; Tamney 1996, 38).

Even worse, as far as the government was concerned, Singapore's Muslim and Christian minorities responded to the RK program by intensifying programs of religious outreach in their respective communities. Echoing their liberal and left-leaning counterparts in Indonesia, some Christian youth began to adapt progressive, liberation theology themes in their profession of their faith. Although a minority in Singapore's politically cautious Muslim community (see Siddique in this volume), Muslim activists, too, ran afoul of government policies when they complained that the PAP's emphasis on community self-reliance only guaranteed Muslims' continuing marginalization (cf. Li 1998; Rahim 1998, 39–43). Contrary to the government's intent, then, the RK program did not so much provide an antidote to Western individualism as bring religious difference back into the public square.

Sensing the RK program was getting out of hand, the government in 1989–1990 pulled back from the campaign, citing a report that the program was intensifying religious fervor and deepening ethnoreligious divides (Chua 1995, 30). In 1988 the government appointed a National Ideology Committee, headed by one of Lee's sons, to examine the question of devising an official national ideology, in effect as an alternative to the RK program. The committee eventually released a report recommending the socialization of "Shared Values" which, at least on the surface, had nothing to do with religion. The values were supposed to express in a religiously neutral fashion an "Asian" emphasis on individual sacrifice and social harmony rather than Western individualism (Tamney 1996, 19).

In practice, however, the ostensibly non-ethnic, "shared values" bore a striking resemblance to the étatist Confucianism many in the ruling party had earlier hoped to inculcate through the Religious Knowledge program. The government White Paper described the values as "placing society above the self, upholding the family as the basic building block of society, resolving major issues through consensus instead of contentions, and stressing racial and religious tolerance and harmony." The first principle was later reworded "as 'nation before community and society above self' to reflect the multiracial composition of Singapore" (Chua 1995, 32).

In the face of similar pluralist challenges but a different ethnoreligious balance, then, Singapore has moved toward citizenship policies quite unlike those of its two neighbors. Religion and ethnicity remain central to official formulations of citizenship in Malaysia. The Malaysian constitution identifies Malays as the beneficiaries of special state programs. It also defines a Malay as someone who, among other things, professes Islam (Mutalib 1990, 8). Religious education in Malaysia's schools is mandatory for Muslims but not for non-Muslims. In Indonesia, communal identities are given little recognition in the constitution, with the notable exception that the 1945 constitution stipulates the president must be indigenous. Nonetheless, many state programs have been premised on the distinction between indigenes and Chinese. In matters of religion, there is no single state religion but, at least since 1966, every citizen is obliged to adhere to one of the five religions officially recognized by the state. In the last years of the Suharto regime, finally, the government's neutrality on the five religions gave way to open courtship of regime-friendly Muslims.

Having flirted briefly with a program of religious education, the Singapore government quickly pulled back, opting for policies that present religion as first and foremost a private matter. Meanwhile, the state foreswears any and all programs for ethnically based affirmative action. It

does allow ethnocommunal organizations to play a public role, but this is limited to self-help in such fields as education, family counseling, and delinquency control. Meanwhile, the state publicly promotes what it claims is an ethnically invisible program of "shared values." In reality, however, the shared values are based on the government's long-standing and selective reinterpretation of Confucian values in a manner that emphasizes loyalty to the state and capitalist self-discipline.

Beng-Huat Chua (1995) and Joseph Tamney (1996) have both expressed doubts about the long-term prospects of this government-mandated values program. As Chua and Kwok emphasize in their essay in this volume, Singapore's economic success has greatly diminished the siege mentality among the population. The growing differentiation of tastes and lifestyles among the country's large middle class has not engendered a militant anti-PAP opposition. But it has stimulated a deep public appetite for individual expression and personal freedom. Chua and Kwok's essay also shows that the government continues to impose strict controls on formal politics. The sociologist Robert Tamney (1996, 61) goes further than these authors do, speaking of an "absence of an independent civil society" in the island nation. Nonetheless, he too shows that, at a less formal level of public action, many in the Singaporean middle class are voting loud and clear for personal freedom and multicultural tolerance. The "developmentalist ideology" about which Francis Kok Loh speaks in his essay on Malaysia seems here in Singapore to have ushered in something not anticipated by government handlers: a public thirst for participation and civil decency. Shamsul A.B. sees hints of a similar trend among the Malaysian middle classes.

These changes in Singaporean society still fall far short of institutional democratization. The government maintains extensive controls on the press and political activity, and requires all non-governmental organizations to be officially registered. Public criticism of the government exacts a high price; in the case of public associations, it brings swift deregistration. However strict these controls, the economic and cultural vitality so apparent in the essays by Siddique and Chua and Kwon in this volume show that Singapore's citizens are developing an appetite for public participation and multicultural dialogue. As in Indonesia, of course, history shows that ruling elites can ignore trends in civil society and do violence to those who would promote a democratic alternative to established ways. However, Singapore is not plagued with Indonesia's deep foundational divides, and the PAP elite is vastly more savvy than the Suhartoist clique. With a little luck, civility-enhancing trends in this society may yet allow the tightly wound PAP leadership to loosen up and trust its citizens.

## Conclusion

What conclusions might we draw from the history and politics of these Southeast Asian pluralisms? The three countries remind us, first of all, that the Western world did not pioneer the tasting of the forbidden fruit of cultural pluralism. As in Southeast Asia, other parts of the world have their own rich histories of diversity and participation. No more than the West, in premodern times none of these Southeast Asian societies devised formulas that democratic-minded people would today find acceptable for coordinating citizenship across deep cultural divides. But elements of the earlier legacy remain, and, at the very least, its best elements have to be engaged if the effort to promote a more participatory pluralism is to resonate with local actors and organizations.

A second, related lesson concerns the impact of Western colonialism on this Southeast Asian heritage. Because some Western scholars still portray the West as the world-conquering carrier of pluralist tolerance, it is important to remind ourselves that, in these three Southeast Asian societies as in much of the colonial world (cf. Cohn 1996; Mamdani 1996), the immediate impact of Western colonialism was the exacerbation and rigidification of ethnoreligious differences. Where before there had been a canopied civilizational identity that facilitated easy cultural exchange among many (although never all) of the region's ethnic groups, European colonialism laid the foundation for the rigidly oppositional identities of "plural societies" fame. Where before there had been a multiethnic, multireligious, and open system of maritime commerce, European conquest segregated the economic system along ethnic lines. Aspects of the economic system changed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as Europeans promoted a shift from colonial to liberal capitalism. Although a few attempts were made at cultural liberalization as well, most colonial segregations remained firmly in place. They were left intact because, as Furnivall sensed but did not adequately emphasize, the Europeans used the "lack of a common will" to their political and economic advantage.

After two generations of nation-building and market-making, the face of pluralism in these three countries is much changed. No more than in the West (experiencing its own multicultural anxieties), there is no historical teleology pressing these societies to an inevitably democratic outcome. But there are some interesting, even promising trends. As their economies have grown and their societies differentiate, we see a proliferation of new societal organizations and relationships. In political theory in the 1990s, extra-state arrangements like these—roughly, "civil

society"—were celebrated as the golden road to democracy. Civic associations may indeed facilitate heightened and equitable participation. However, by themselves these associations fall far short of guaranteeing citizen equity and inclusivity. The Malay ethnic organizations that took shape in British Malaya during the first half of the twentieth century were an important forum for articulating Malay interests. Threatened by Chinese urban skills and economic dynamism, however, the Malay elite used the organizations to block Chinese efforts to secure citizen rights. Similarly, under the Suharto regime (1966–1998), conservative business groups used their networks to collude with the military and bureaucratic elite to limit access to the marketplace. More recently, the Indonesian *jihad* (lit., religious "struggle") groups funded by old regime conservatives to do battle against "Christians" in Maluku (Hefner 2000b; Tomagola 2000) show many of the traits of self-organization and voluntarism we associate with civil society. But their cultural impact on citizenship and religious relations is anything but civil.

In these and other examples, we are reminded that, rather than always "making democracy work," associations in civil society can promote uncivil, sectarian interests. Originating as they do in diverse societies, civic associations may sometimes be used to promote the interests of one social grouping *against* another rather than for the democratic good.

This complexity acknowledged, civil society must still be regarded as part of what is needed to strike this difficult balance of democracy with multicultural civility. For these latter ends to be realized, organizations in society must do more than merely provide a space for voluntarism and self-organization apart from the state. They must also contribute to the generalization of a distinctive political culture: a culture that enjoins people to be *citizens*, extending rights of participation to all members of society, especially to weaker individuals or minority groups who might otherwise be barred from full participation. Even this, however, is not yet enough. Once the citizen-making dynamic begins in society, its best principles must be "scaled up" (Evans 1996; Hefner 2000a) into the ideals and actions of the state. Rather than running against civil forces in society, the state must work with them.

It is on this last point that the three countries discussed in this book have the most to tell. All three countries have seen significant growth in incomes, civic organizations, and public dialogue since the early independence period. In fact, by most measures, civil society and the public sphere in all three countries have matured considerably more than has the state. In Singapore, the majority of citizens were willing during the early years of independence to sacrifice personal freedoms for the sake of economic

growth and, equally important, the security of their vulnerable nation. As Singaporeans have become wealthier and better educated, few want to give this up for radical political change. Most share with the government a keen interest in giving their small country the cultural edge it requires to remain economically competitive in an era of globalization. All the same, there is a sense among many citizens that their patience and moderation have been ignored by a government that seems too sure of itself and too distrustful of its people.

All the same, Singapore offers grounds for cautious optimism. Although the Muslim minority is, by comparison with the country's other populations, marginalized from mainstream politics and education (Rahim 1998), Muslims, too, show the same level-headed moderation as Singapore's other ethnic communities. This example gets to the heart of what most inspires confidence in Singapore's future. The island nation has none of the foundational divides that, in nearby Malaysia or, especially, Indonesia, threaten to put the entire framework of public participation and governance in question. A secure foundation for nation and participation has been laid, even though some in government continue to act as if this were not the case.

As Joseph Tamney (1996) has observed, most of what the Singapore government promotes as Asian values are not particularly "Asian"; they are variations on pro-market and stability-first themes once emphasized by conservative governments in the West. Singapore's citizens have demonstrated a shrewd skepticism toward the government's values campaign. Proud of their multicultural heritage and their economic success, most feel that the values claimed by the government as necessary for Singapore's future don't do justice to the complexity of society or the sophistication of its citizenry. Tamney (1996, 194) is probably right to conclude that the culture war between the government and its citizens will continue. There are clear signs, however, that the government is losing this war; the "shared values" campaign, one suspects, will eventually fade into ineffectuality. Barring some governmental intemperance, Singapore seems a good candidate for a slow but steady evolution from conservative statism toward a more civil state and society.

In Malaysia, there are still serious foundational questions being asked about the terms for nation and citizenship—especially among the country's politically dominant but deeply divided Malay population. All the same, recent years have seen substantial progress on ethnoreligious matters. However checkered their achievement in terms of justice, equity, and transparency, state policies have succeeded in boosting the incomes and confidence of the Malay population and thereby diminishing economic influences on ethnoreligious tensions.

Religion is never just a proxy for economic forces, however, and since the 1980s the Islamic resurgence has acquired a momentum of its own, complicating the progress achieved in the economic field. Some of the motivation for the resurgence does appear to have originated in Malays' "closing of ranks against the non-Malay" (Nagata 1984, 234). But others in the resurgence, even some strict-constructionist conservatives in the Islamist party, PAS, have criticized Malay-first programs as un-Islamic. Other pious Muslims, such as the middle-class professionals represented in Chandra Muzaffar's Justice Party (mentioned in Shamsul's essay), have given this critique a progressive twist. For them, Malay set-asides are not merely un-Islamic, but, unless explicitly justifiable in democratic terms, corrosive of the inclusive citizenship that Malaysia needs now more than ever.

There are signs that even some in the ruling party, UMNO, have begun to think in these terms. They are doing so, not just because of some sudden conversion to the idea of a "Malaysian nation," but because the sophisticated among the Malay elite, and there are many, have a keen understanding of the nature of global capitalism, with its greatly increased mobility of knowledge, actors, and capital. Many, too, have developed genuinely close ties to Chinese Malaysians. On the basis of these experiences, then, this segment of the new Malay middle class has come to understand that Chinese Malaysians must be made to feel that they have a full and equal share in the project of Malaysia if the country is to make the transition from a low-wage manufacturer to a knowledge-based economy.

For attitudinal changes like these to have a broader impact, however, they cannot remain the idle suggestions of a few; they must be scaled up into the policies and programs of the state. The tragically short-sighted prosecution during 1998–2000 of the former deputy prime minister, Anwar Ibrahim, shows that intraelite rivalries can override trends in society, not to mention the better judgment of many in the governing class. With its impressive advances in education, infrastructure, and poverty alleviation, Malaysia in the late 1990s seemed like a dazzling example of a mature society in need of a civil polity to consolidate its social and economic progress. The prosecution of Anwar and the subsequent crackdown on pro-democracy dissidents was a serious setback in this regard. The example reminds us that, however impressive the gains in society, a democratic polity remains incomplete, indeed impossible, without a *civil-ized* state.

This, of course, is also the gist of the problem in contemporary Indonesia, although there it is true several times over. Of the three countries examined in this book, Indonesia began its political career with the most brightly republican of constitutions and the most inclusive charter for citizenship. Today Indonesia deserves every democrat's praise for having created the largest movement for a democratic Islam in the world.

Sadly, however, Indonesia has long had difficulty getting elite political practice to match high ideological ideals, even where those ideals have been shared by much of the population. This has proved to be especially difficult during the foundational crises into which Indonesia has regularly fallen. During these unhappy moments, all the progress of previous years seems forgotten, and the grounds for nation and citizenship are put in question again.

What makes these political fits dangerous is not the intensity of ideological argument per se, but the intemperate political maneuvers attempted by a few among the political and military elite. The all-too-familiar pattern to crises like these has been for segments of the elites to break out of the impasse at the center by reaching out into society and mobilizing violent, para-political vigilantes against rivals. It was just such a dynamic that gave Indonesia the awful violence of 1965–1966, in which Muslims and others joined forces with the conservative military to strike at the Communist Party, massacring hundreds of thousands of hapless peasants in the process (Cribb 1990; Hefner 2000a). As Geoffrey Robinson (1995, 11) has observed in an excellent study of the state and violence in Bali, "the roots of the political conflict and violence from 1945 to 1966 may be located in the actual participation of elements of the state—or the use of state institutions—on either or both sides of various political struggles."

Unfortunately, all signs are that this vicious circle of state factionalization and para-political violence did not end in 1966. Whatever his pluralist reputation in the West, Suharto never missed a chance to exploit ethnoreligious divisions for his own purposes. In a similar manner, some of the ethnoreligious violence afflicting Indonesia today bears the telltale signs of elite provocation, instigated or abetted by allies of the former president. Sadly, in unleashing these un-civil forces, Indonesia's ancien régime threatens to destroy the great reservoir of civility long found in Indonesian society and in the even more remarkable movement for a democratic Islam.

The roads to democracy and civic pluralism are necessarily varied. In an earlier and more naive age, some observers trumpeted the working class as the key to democracy's possibility. Others placed their bets on the middle class. Sobered by the painful evidence of modern history, we now realize that the middle and working classes are as diverse as everyone else. If they are to become a force for democracy, these classes have to get their house in order on matters of citizenship and multicultural difference. To do that, much more is required than the faithful pursuit of some alleged "class interest." A public sphere of democratic participation premised on a culture of inclusive citizenship must take shape. Even this is not enough.

The achievements of societal participation and inclusivity come to nothing if their best principles are not at some point projected up from society into the structures of state. This is to say that democracy depends, not just on civil society and not just on formal political structures, but on a synergy of state and society that deepens the democratic dispositions of both.

There is a final corollary to this pluralist perspective on democracy and multicultural citizenship. Where whole segments of a society are barred from public participation by poverty or historical discrimination, we should not be surprised to see some members of the disadvantaged group press for special measures to endow them with the resources needed for fuller participation. As with African Americans in the United States or Malays in Malaysia, this may well lead to calls for a "differentiated citizenship" (Parekh 1991)—institutional distinctions among citizens by ethnicity, race, gender, or whatever, so as to provide disadvantaged groups with special services to improve their station.

Market liberals may wince at such claims, and certain simplistic democrats may decry what they see as the imposition of "group rights" over "individual rights." However, few statements generate more heat and less light when it comes to citizenship than this clumsy opposition between group and individual rights. Contrary, for example, to the discourse of "Asian values," most of what we call "individual rights" are not selfishly atomized possessions exercised at the expense of others. On the contrary, as with the right to speak or associate freely, they are "typically used to sustain a wide range of social relationships" (Kymlicka 1995, 26). In so doing, these individual rights contribute to the development of vital public goods. Not the least of these is a culture of civility that extends equal citizens rights to others.

If, contrary to Asian values claims, individual rights have inherently social or collective benefits, it is equally true that the effective exercise of individual rights requires the provision or maintenance of public resources and opportunities. Where, as a result of historical accident or deliberate discrimination, a segment of the population has been denied those opportunities, there is nothing undemocratic or unjust about targeting resources for the improvement of the life chances of that disenfranchised population. There is no contradiction between democratic citizenship and affirmative programs like these if their purpose is stated loudly and clearly as leveling the playing field so as to create the conditions for equitable participation. In other words, an ethnic-, religion-, or gender-differentiated citizenship may be a fair way station on the road to full participation for all.

Programs like these raise more troubling questions, however, where they are presented, not as way stations on the road to equality, but as permanently differentiated rankings. Officialized hierarchies may not have posed a serious problem where the communities making up society lived "side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit" (Furnivall 1944, 446). Today, however, in an age of unprecedented spatial and social mobility, it is difficult and costly in human terms to segregate individuals by ethnicity, religion, or gender. At some point, we will begin to hear calls for more symmetrical forms of citizen participation, even in societies long regarded as the locus classicus of "plural society." The normative power of such appeals has been strengthened by the high costs of segregation and, conversely, the clear benefits of fair play and collaboration among *all* citizens. The power of these appeals is also strengthened by the desire of growing numbers of residents in old ethnoreligious villages to be allowed to stroll out onto open cultural avenues, experimenting with new lifestyles and creating "hybridic" identities, rather than remaining cloistered behind the thick walls of a single ethnic tradition (see Modood 2000).

A generation ago, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz observed, "Thus, in apparent paradox . . . the move toward national unity intensified group tensions within the society by raising settled cultural forms out of their particular context, expanding them into general allegiances, and politicizing them" (Geertz 1973a, 245). Market-making and nation-building in the countries discussed in this book have indeed removed ethnic and religious solidarities from their old settings, and projected them into new political arenas. As Geertz feared, in some places the process has unleashed what appear to be civility-destroying contestations. Elsewhere, however, the process has convinced more and more people of the importance of forging civil polities and inclusive citizenship.

There is no teleology to history, and the outcome of struggles like these is as yet unclear. What is certain, however, is that these three Southeast Asian societies stand at a critical threshold in their modern history. The achievements made possible by pluralist interaction in education, the market, and public culture have been impressive. For some actors, these changes invite a comparable transition in politics, toward a more inclusive practice of citizenship. As the recent history of these three countries shows so well, however, the domains that comprise modern society do not always develop in tandem. No less significant, the interests to which elites in state and society respond are, to say the least, more varied than market efficiency or democratic participation alone. In an age of heightened human, cultural, and capital mobility, however, the social costs of anti-civil policies will continue to be high. Despite the protestations of certain conser-

vative rulers to the contrary, then, we can be certain of one thing: that many citizens will come to regard the ideal of an equitable and inclusive citizenship, not as a "Western" invention, but, rightly, as their own.

## Notes

1. Although the mainstream agreed with Huntington, there were variable views at the margins of modernization theory. A well-respected anthropological exponent of modernization theory in the early 1960s, Clifford Geertz took a less jaundiced view of democracy and ethnoreligious pluralism. Although he made clear that democracy requires a "civic culture" that stands above the "primordial sentiments" of religion, ethnicity, language, and race, he took pains to emphasize that this civic culture "does not require the simple replacement of primordial ties and identifications by civil ones. . . . What it does demand is an adjustment between them" (Geertz 1973b, 308). Curiously, although highlighting the need for this overarching civic sensibility, Geertz, like most in political science at this time, admitted he had few insights into how this civic culture developed in the West, or might yet emerge in developing societies. "Again, however, though we have at least a general idea of the nature of civility and the range of forms through which it is materialized in industrial states, very little is known about the processes by which the present patterns have come to be what they are" (Geertz 1973b, 309).

2. On the challenge of the ethnoreligious revival to secular nationalism, especially in developing countries, see Juergensemeyer 1993.

3. See Granovetter 1985; Hefner 1998a.

4. Furnivall was not alone, of course, in this idealized portrayal of the West. As the Dutch political theorist Arend Lijphart has observed in another context, there has long been a tendency in Western political theory to make an "overdrawn contrast between the first and third worlds" (Lijphart 1977, 21). The contrast presents Asian and other non-Western societies as seething with primordial incivilities, while presenting the West as homogeneous and civil. In good evolutionary manner, the model then assumes that political development involves a movement from the former state of primordialism to something more like the West.

5. Singapore was granted self-government in domestic affairs in 1959, but became formally independent from Great Britain in 1963, when it joined with the former British colonies of Sabah and Sarawak in Borneo to enter the Malaysian Federation. Singapore was expelled two years later, after disputes with Malay authorities in Kuala Lumpur over Chinese and Malay citizen rights.

6. For logistical as well as intellectual reasons, not all participants in the initial phase of the project contributed in the end to this volume. Consistent with the Ford Foundation's charter for the project, the project sought not only to engage senior Southeast Asian scholars in research and writing on pluralism and citizen participation, but also to heighten general public discussion of the same issues in the mass media and non-governmental circles. Several project fellows

were active in such undertakings during and after the research period. In Indonesia, two of the participants had to withdraw so as to pursue commitments in the pro-democracy movement. A Malaysian participant had to withdraw from the project as a result of problems surrounding the political crisis of 1998–1999.

7. Kathryn Woolward has raised this same point with reference to Pierre Bourdieu's equally flawed concept of symbolic capital. Bourdieu's model, she notes, also assumes a more or less perfect integration of social, symbolic, and economic "marketplaces." See Woolard 1985, 239–243.

8. Prior to the great "Forward Movement" of British colonial authority into the peninsula in the 1870s, the London Missionary Society had attempted some missionizing among Malays and Chinese in the Straits Settlements. From 1874 on, the British officially upheld the status of Islam in the Malay states and effectively discouraged any further missionizing among Malays (Ackerman and Lee 1988, 30).

9. Dress restrictions on natives had been applied by the Portuguese as early the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; like their counterparts in premodern Europe, native rulers across the archipelago had also imposed dress restrictions on their populations. What made the nineteenth-century Dutch policies so distinctive is that they were linked to a putatively "scientific" theory and racial and ethnic distinctiveness.

10. Anthony Milner argues that the category of "Malay" (*Melayu*) was a colonial-era invention, not applied to the disparate peoples of the peninsula's varied sultanates until well into the late nineteenth century. The historian Barbara Andaya (personal communication) challenges this claim, noting that "the term *'bangsa Melayu'* is found on a *piagem* [charter] from fifteenth century Palembang, and there are innumerable other references to orang Melayu [Malay people] in later sources." Whatever the precise status of this controversy, it seems clear that, prior to the late nineteenth century, the concept of "Malay" was more variegated in its usages than it was to become. More to the point, it carried with it little of the modern, proto-nationalist sense of a "people" with shared destinies and entitlements.

11. There were exceptions to this pattern, such as the Minangkabau region of West Sumatra, where native Minang merchants held their own against Chinese merchants throughout the whole of the colonial period. See Kahn 1993; Peletz 1998.

12. In both Malaysia and Indonesia, locally born and Indonesian/Malay-speaking Chinese, known as *peranakan* or, in Malay, *Baba*, are distinguished from foreign-born, China-oriented, and Chinese-speaking immigrants, often referred to as *totok* (see Suryadinata 1992, 2). With the flurry of excitement and the flush of pride that accompanied the emergence of the nationalist movement in mainland China in the early 1900s, many in the Indies and Malayan Chinese communities, both *peranakan* and *totok*, identified with the homeland struggle and distanced themselves from political campaigns in the European colonies. However, from the 1910s on, some in both *peranakan* communities, especially in Indone-

sia, placed themselves alongside the indigenous nationalist community and sought to acquire equal rights as citizens. After independence the overwhelming majority of *peranakan* in both countries shifted their sights away from China and identified with the struggle for citizenship and equality. Faced with the reality of indigenous dominance in the state, and pressured by new state policies discriminating against resident aliens, even many *totok* at this time joined with the *peranakan* in seeking citizen rights. Nonetheless, some in the *totok* community continued to identify with China. In part, no doubt, the *totok* attitude reflected anxieties about their long-term prospects for integrating into Indonesian society. However, the *totok* view also showed the influence of the People's Republic's official policy on Indonesians of Chinese descent. Until the signing of a dual nationality treaty with Indonesia in the 1960s, the People's Republic of China (PRC) officially regarded Indonesians of Chinese descent as Chinese nationals (Suryadinata 1992, 119). On the attitude of Chinese-Indonesians toward the Indonesian nation and the Indonesian state toward Chinese, see Suryadinata 1992. On the changing situation of the Chinese in twentieth-century Malaysia, see Lee and Tan 2000.

13. The eating example is, however, a complex one. A pious reform Muslim critical of the ethnonationalist coloring in so much Malay Islam, Hussin Mutalib (1990, 164) notes that the ethnic emphasis seen in Malaysia's Muslim resurgence has resulted in a "noticeable decrease in social interaction among the country's ethno-religious plural polity," not least of all in the sharing of meals. Since the mid-1990s, however, one has also begun to see an interesting counter-trend in the middle and upper-middle classes, visible in both upscale and modest Chinese restaurants in Malaysian cities. Namely, some Chinese restaurants have stopped serving pork and started preparing their fish and meats in a *halal* (religiously proper) manner, in an effort to appeal to Malay customers. In these establishments, it is not unusual to see Malay and Chinese customers eating together. On this resurgence of everyday commensalities, see also the essay by Rahman Embong in this volume.

14. In 1990, Malays comprised 14.1 percent and Indians 7.1 percent of the Singaporean population (Tamney 1996, 2).

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# 2

# The Culture and Practice of Pluralism in Postcolonial Malaysia

*Abdul Rahman Embong*

Thanks in part to the work of J. S. Furnivall (1948), the problem of pluralism in Malaysia has attracted keen interest among scholars and commentators from this country as well as from outside the region. The continuing importance of the problem can be gleaned from the current ethnic mix in the Malaysian population, which in 1998, numbered 22.2 million. Of the total population, the majority is made up of people regarded as being the original or indigenous peoples of the country, known in Malay as *bumiputera* (lit., "sons/daughters of the soil"). They comprise 57.8 percent of the total; of this percentage, Malays comprise 49.0 percent and non-Malay *bumiputera* the remaining 8.8 percent. The *bumiputera* are followed by Chinese at 24.9 percent, Indians 7.0 percent, and "Others" 3.1 percent (Malaysia 1999, 96–97). Resident aliens, made up mostly of Indonesian migrant workers, comprise a significant 7.2 percent of the total population.

The non-*bumiputera,* who migrated to Malaysia largely since the second half of the nineteenth century, have become an integral part of Malaysian society and contributed significantly to the country's development. While the fertility rates of all ethnic groups in recent years have begun to decline, their annual fertility rates differ quite significantly. The *bumiputera* register a 3.7 percent annual growth rate, while the fertility rates for the Chinese and Indians are 2.5 percent and 2.6 percent respectively. The faster pace of *bumiputera* population growth will alter Malaysia's future ethnic map.

As can be seen from the figures, migration, especially transnational migration during the colonial era and in recent decades, has been a major factor in the making of modern pluralism in this country.[1] Malaysian pluralism in all its dimensions—ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural, and others—was largely shaped during the colonial period, although, as the introduction to this volume makes clear, it has roots in the precolonial period as well. Ethnic pluralism in contemporary Malaysia is now characterized not only by the existence of the various well-recognized ethnic groups—Malays, Chinese, Indians, Iban, Kadazan, and ethnic minorities such as the Orang Asli and the Siamese—but also of less recognized, and sometimes even clandestine, Indonesian migrants. Reflecting the contradictory processes of convergence and divergence, Malaysian pluralism has no doubt been a source of tension and conflict in the society; it remains a force for change today. The ongoing process of transnational migration, for example, is likely to have a impact on Malaysian society, a fact that indicates that Malaysian pluralism is being redefined even by forces operating beyond the borders of the nation-state.

Be that as it may, it should be acknowledged that Malaysia has a long history of cosmopolitanism, and that pluralism in Malaysia predates colonialism. Having its sources in major Asian civilizations and great world religions that had interacted with each other since the beginning of history in the Malayo-Indonesian archipelago (see the introduction), pluralism has also been a source of the country's strength, vitality, and uniqueness. It has contributed to multiethnic understanding and cooperation, softening ethnoreligious extremism and increasing the prospects for tolerance, civility, and social participation.

For many decades, the issue of pluralism has confronted Malaysian policy makers, intellectuals, and market players in policy debates and bargaining, at times openly and at other times behind the scene. Oftentimes, it is elite-level discourses, especially among contending political leaders, which become particularly prominent, such as regularly occurs during election periods. This can cause interethnic tensions at the grassroots level, as was tragically illustrated in the ethnic riots of 1969.

The questions facing academic and policy consideration in Malaysia today are, Can pluralism serve as social resources for civility and participation in Malaysia in the twenty-first century? How might pluralism be transformed into a positive social capital? This essay suggests that, thirty years after the May 13, 1969 ethnic riots, the prospects for the development of such civic resources are good, especially in light of broader developments in society. But there are contestation and counter-currents operating in Malaysian society as well. To assess these trends, I want in this essay first

to examine six macro-developments in public ethnic interactions. These six points will then provide the backdrop for the micro-analysis that follows in the second part of the essay.

## Macro-Pluralisms

The first point I wish to emphasize is that Malaysia's postindependence transformation has brought new actors on the historical stage—most significantly, the new middle class (Abdul Rahman 1999, 1996, 1995). These actors operate across economic, political, social, cultural, and religious spaces, and serve as brokers for new patterns of ethnoreligious interaction in society. Although rudiments of these classes were already present one hundred years ago under British colonialism, their expansion is a recent phenomenon. Their growth is closely related to the drive toward industrialization and modernization in postindependence Malaysia, spurred by rapid capitalist development and expansion of a strong developmentalist state. Unlike the earlier Malay middle class, which consisted largely of administrators and schoolteachers, the new Malay middle class consists primarily of managers and professionals working in both the private and state sectors. This new class has taken shape over the past thirty years, and today is a major presence in Malaysian cities and towns.

The affirmative action programs of the New Economic Policy (NEP, 1971–1990) played a critical role in the formation of the new Malay middle class. These same policies provoked three sets of responses from non-*bumiputera* citizens, especially the Chinese. The responses included silent acquiescence, pragmatic accommodation, and, finally, open resentment expressed most vividly in the out-migration of Chinese capital and professionals. However, since the Malay-dominated state has generally been market-friendly and actively promoted market growth even while implementing the NEP's programs, over the longer term NEP policies have not diminished the capitalist and middle classes among other Malaysians, least of all among the Chinese. In fact, the rapid pace of capitalist growth has allowed the economically stronger Chinese community to expand its new middle class as well.

Since the late 1980s, economic growth and the state's liberalization of education and cultural policies, greatly easing restrictions on non-Malay access to higher education, have combined to encourage the return of many Chinese professionals who had earlier migrated from Malaysia. This has in turn led to a new spirit of cooperation and acceptance across ethnic divides. The result is that, unlike the pre-1970s period, when the new

middle class in Malaysia was overwhelmingly Chinese, the contemporary new Malaysian middle class is multiethnic in composition, with the new Malay middle class constituting a major component. The new middle class has a cultural dynamic of its own, which has produced myriad adaptations, innovations, and resistances.

A second point flows from this first one on the new middle classes. Industrialization and market changes driven by state-led modernization have resulted in both material and ideational changes, which have far-reaching consequences for pluralism. In particular, these processes have created new public spheres in which there occurs greater interaction among people of various ethnic groups. Far more than was the case a generation ago, people from different ethnic groups now mingle with one another at work and in residential areas as well as in associations and other social activities, especially in highly urbanized regions. People from the peninsular east coast and even from Sabah and Sarawak in Malaysian Borneo, for example, have moved in great numbers to the Klang Valley around Kuala Lumpur, as well as other metropolitan centers, in search of jobs, business opportunities, or higher education. These changes have opened greater opportunities for social mobility for the young of different ethnic groups. The mobility has changed parental attitudes too. The older generation has come to accept change, and agree that in today's world, children have a right to choose what they want to do and where they want to go. Such liberal attitudes facilitate social change and mobility and help open wider opportunities for the young of all ethnic groups.

My third point is that economic growth, market expansion, and the growth of the new middle classes have impacted on personal values and practices. In particular, to borrow a phrase from Francis Loh Kok Wah's essay, a new, "developmentalist" ideology has taken hold among these classes. Perhaps more than Francis, however, I would emphasize that this ideology has one important unintended consequence: it deemphasizes ethnicity while highlighting development and growth. As Francis stresses, however, the ideology also pushes individuals toward consumerism while distancing them from politics, especially any that might be critical of the state. This developmentalist ideology has played a major role in generating continuing support for the ruling National Front/Barisan Nasional (BN) in recent years. The ruling alliance is dominated by the United Malays National Organization (UMNO), but includes Chinese, Indian, and other alliance parties. Indeed, the ideology has been especially important in generating support for the BN from non-Malays. As I show later in this essay, this developmentalist ideology has not extinguished ethnicity so much as it has succeeded in (partially) privatizing it. At the same time, new

forms of civility and participation among various ethnic groups have emerged. The precise ethnoreligious patterns are varied, with some enterprises and organizations remaining monoethnic, while others have become multiethnic. But the presence of new, multiethnic organizations and interactions is deeply significant.

My fourth point is that, whatever the influence of this developmentalist ideology, articulate members of the new middle class have come forward not only with new forms of association, self-expression, and initiative, but also with new ideas regarding the proper balance among state, market, and civil society. However tentative or unfinished, this development is creating the possibility for a new kind of political culture in Malaysia. Much as Shamsul A.B. emphasizes in his essay in this book, the expansion of a multiethnic middle class has been accompanied by a proliferation of civil society or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as new types of mass media, including, not insignificantly, the Internet. The latter medium has experienced phenomenal growth since September 1998, in the aftermath of the expulsion of Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Anwar Ibrahim from the cabinet. Despite unhappiness with the proliferation of pro-Anwar sites, the Internet became a preferred site for discussion of and opposition to the sacking of Anwar, who had previously been the heir-apparent of Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad.

The new non-governmental organizations and media have responded in various ways to the strengthening of the state and market expansion. The struggles they have witnessed include demands for human rights, rights for women and children, programs for the elderly and minorities, consumer rights, environmental protection, and so on. The emergence of these civic organizations together with democratic political parties and public intellectuals have contributed toward the opening up of a more democratic public sphere and the growth of an incipient civil society, giving rise to new solidarities that cross ethnic and religious lines. Described by analysts as "neither authoritarian nor democratic" (Crouch 1996), the state has shown an ambivalent attitude toward these developments. It has courted and supported some NGOs, while taking a hostile stance toward others.

My fifth point is that linguistic, cultural, educational, and artistic spheres have shown an especially striking development of new pluralist images and values. In educational institutions, for example, one sees Malaysian children of various ethnic and religious backgrounds studying side by side in national schools using one common language, Malay. At the same time, and perhaps more remarkably, a growing number of

non-Chinese children, estimated today at about forty thousand, are attending Chinese schools. Over the past decade, in addition, alongside the public tertiary institutions that use Malay as the medium of instruction, private tertiary institutions have also sprouted up using English as the medium of instruction and taking in students (the majority of whom are non-Malays) who cannot find places in the limited number of public institutions. On the cultural front, we have in these same years seen a new and celebratory growth of ethnic cultural expressions in the form of dances, songs, and other artistic expressions (for example, poetry, theater, short stories). These developments have been partially influenced by the state's interest in promoting tourism, but they have attracted an interest considerably beyond state programs.

My sixth point is that, in the religious sphere, the past thirty years have seen the growth of new religious movements among the major religious denominations—Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Taoists, and others (Muzaffar 1987; Anwar 1987; Ackerman and Lee 1988; Shamsul 1994; Sharifah Zaleha 1997; Jeffrey 1999). Some of these new movements appear to be reactions against Westernizing modernization and globalization (Beyer 1994). These movements, especially the Islamic movement, have had a significant impact on state policies and struggles, on people's everyday lives, and on ethnic relations. In fact, some Islamist groups have sought to devise alternative institutions in the name of Islam, setting up their own educational institutions and medical centers, among other things.

Under the leadership of Dr. Mahathir, the ruling National Front (BN)—especially its dominant partner, the United Malay National Organization (UMNO)—responded to the Islamic upsurge by repositioning itself on Islam. Calling themselves "moderates" and "Islamic modernists," BN leaders instituted their own Islamization policies. In the process, they also implemented a number of measures, including the establishment of an Islamic banking system, streamlining the administration of Islam, and setting up the International Islamic University. All this led to the increasing influence of religious ideals and authority over the state and society.

On the political front, the co-optation in 1982 of the charismatic leader of the Islamic youth movement, Anwar Ibrahim, into UMNO and the BN government was an attempt to counteract the tide of Islamic resurgence directed by UMNO's opponent, PAS (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party). As Zainah Anwar emphasizes in her essay in this book, PAS espouses the establishment of an Islamic state. However, Anwar's sacking on September 2, 1998, and the subsequent growth of the *reformasi* (reformation) movement with the support of all the major oppo-

sition parties and many NGOs has turned the Islamic tide against UMNO. This gave a great boost to PAS's fortunes, as evident in its massive inroads in the Malay heartland (Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah, and Perlis) and in several other states during the general elections of November 29, 1999. In that election, PAS succeeded in retaining its control over the state of Kelantan, while also capturing the neighboring state of Trengganu. It also more than trebled its representation in the current 193-seat Malaysian parliament—from eight to twenty-seven MPs (Members of Parliament). With PAS being the major opposition party, Malaysia for the first time in its political history has both a Malay-dominated government and opposition.[2]

These developments create a complex situation for pluralism in Malaysia, opening up spaces for both cooperation and tolerance, as well as contestation and struggles among different groups in society. While some members of the middle class have used diversities in ethnicity, religion, language, and culture to sharpen social divisions, others are developing pluralist values and organizations premised on new formulas for pluralist tolerance. In the remainder of this essay I attempt to analyze the complex interplay of these developments as well as their implications for civility and participation in contemporary Malaysia as it enters the new millennium. The data for this chapter is based on seventy-four in-depth interviews conducted, transcribed, and analyzed in the first half of 1999. The interview informants, four-fifths of whom were males, were drawn in non-random samples from the economic, religious, social, and political sectors.[3]

## New Economic Alignments

Although there are contestations and disagreements surrounding economic policies in contemporary Malaysia, recent years have also seen new forms of interethnic participation, such as those dubbed "smart partnerships" in the business sector. There is evidence to suggest that Malay and non-Malay business groups are developing new, complementary relationships through these smart partnerships, replacing the old-style "Ali-Baba" partnerships of the 1960s and 1970s.[4] While one should not romanticize these developments and ignore their underlying problems or tensions (I discuss these later), one cannot deny the fact that these new partnerships have come to provide new opportunities for interethnic civility and participation in the economic field.

At the national level, this emerging trend has been institutionalized with the setting up in 1995 of the Council for the Promotion of Genuine Joint Ventures (Majlis Galakan Usahasama Tulen—MGUT), whose function

is to promote cooperation between *bumiputera* and non-*bumiputera* business groups. The MGUT has representatives from the Malaysian Malay Chamber of Commerce (DPMM), the Malaysian Associated Chinese Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCIM), the Malaysian Associated Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MAICCI), the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development, and a consortium of twenty banks. As of December 1998, fifty-three such joint ventures, mostly between Malays and Chinese from small and medium manufacturing industries (SMIs), have been set up (*Laporan Tahunan* 1998, 34–35). These joint ventures do not include those formed or initiated by businesspersons on their own at some stages in their business career.

However, the language and practice of interethnic participation is not confined to state-sanctioned entities. It is widespread within the business community as a whole. Several Malay businesspersons interviewed in this study show how they have synergized their business enterprises with Chinese partners to benefit from each other's strengths. There are Malay businesspersons with construction work experience who have teamed up with Chinese engineering firms to become property developers. There is the case of a prominent Malay businessman who is chairman of several companies listed on the Second Board of the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange (KLSE) who works closely with his Chinese partners, doing so even through the 1997–1998 economic crisis and the subsequent recovery.

The view that Malay and non-Malay businesses should cooperate and be involved in collaborative synergies is shared by Chinese and Indian businesspersons too. A Chinese businessman in Kuala Lumpur who is also an active member in a Buddhist association likens his relationship with his Malay business partners as "a healthy marriage . . . (in which) we are actually helping each other"; he adds that the old, "Ali-Baba" type of relationship should no longer be allowed. However, he feels that genuine partnerships should not be forced, but should evolve naturally. He observes that one "should know the other as friends first, before entering into joint business ventures."

This view is shared by a prominent Chinese businessman in Sarawak who regards his business partnership with the Malay/*bumiputera* as a relationship with potential for great expansion. He adds that he has "no problem" with his company's *bumiputera* directors since "they are experienced." Echoing these sentiments, the chairman of the Malaysian Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry reveals that he and others work closely with members of both the Malay and Chinese chambers of commerce. He also observed that he would like to see the amalgamation of the three chambers into a unified national body in the future.

Such partnerships are not isolated instances; other informants in this and other studies testify to their appearance on the national scene. A Malay entrepreneur, a UMNO member with government connections and some business experience, stated in our interview that he feels happy about the joint venture he has set up with his Chinese partner. As he puts it, "The partnership is formed on the basis of his [Chinese partner's] experience, his background in business which is long established . . . and with my connections . . . the combination of our business works." Even among those businesspersons who do not form such interethnic partnerships, many who are non-Chinese today join Chinese business associations. This was the case with a Malay entrepreneur we interviewed who worked in catering. Unlike many others who rely heavily on political connections, this businessman (an ex-army officer) started his business after leaving the army, and made use of his business networks with the Chinese to expand his enterprise. As he puts it, "Although I am a Malay, I join the Chinese wholesalers' association, because if I don't, I won't gain the knowledge and experience. . . . And they accept me." He feels that cooperation with Chinese business can be sincere: "If we have conducted business (with them) for some time, and have begun to understand each other, we can tell the Chinese businessmen that we need to prosper too. I tend to feel that Chinese businessmen prefer Malays, because they have the perception that Malays don't cheat."

An important practice related to the business world is philanthropy. Philanthropic activities have expanded in recent years in Malaysia, made possible by business profits and good-minded members of the public. In the main, most philanthropic institutions tend to be confined within the ethnic and/or religious group of their founder. However, in recent years there have been many exceptions to this rule. An interesting discovery from our field project involved the philanthropic activities of a Malay businessman who has Chinese partners in his group of companies listed in the Second Board of the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange (KLSE). Over the past twenty years, he has donated about RM5 million (U.S. $1.3 million) from his profits to charitable organizations of all ethnic groups, including the Chinese poor and the needy. In his own words, "good fortunes come from God, so I must help all." When asked why he took pains to help the Chinese poor in his town, he explained that when he was a lowly lorry driver many years before he joined the business world, the Chinese there were very civil toward him, often treating him with free food and drinks. "So my donations are a kind of expression of gratitude for their good gesture." Although this might be an exceptional case, the fact that Malay philanthropy has crossed ethnic boundaries is a notable development. These

examples show that ethnicity does not necessarily prevent civility and participation between ethnic groups, even in the economic sphere.

The language of participation and civility toward each other in business circles and philanthropy as expressed above provides some ethnographic evidence to support the view that in the 1990s, there was growing integration and interdependence between Chinese and *bumiputera* capital. Chinese capital has come to be seen as complementing, rather than competing with, state or *bumiputera* capital. Unlike the situation in the 1980s, which was characterized mainly by antagonistic paths of ethnic winners and losers (Yoshihara 1988; Jesudason 1990), the 1990s presented a more pluralistic picture of convergence. Some scholars suggest that "the degree of integration and mutual interdependence of Chinese and Malay business groups . . . is likely to add new ballast in the amelioration of ethnic differences" (Searle 1999, 248).

However, does this "new ballast in the amelioration of ethnic differences" in the economic sector also find expression in other domains, namely social and ethnoreligious? The following sections make a modest attempt at answering this question.

## Realignments in Social and Ethnoreligious Spheres

Evidence from our field research shows that the civility and participation in the economic sector described above finds expression to a certain extent in the social and ethnoreligious domains. This is more the case in Malay-dominated smaller towns than in Chinese-dominated major metropolitan areas. There is greater interaction and cross-cultural penetration between ethnic groups despite differences of culture and religion in smaller towns in ethnically diverse states such as Sarawak and also in certain parts of peninsular Malaysia. An interesting case is Lenggong town in Perak, in which Malays make up about two-thirds of the population, the rest being Chinese and (in lesser number) Indians. In this town, Malay businesses thrive alongside Chinese businesses. Malay-owned supermarkets and restaurants have also managed to attract Chinese clientele. Here, as also in many other places, Malay cuisine is very popular among Chinese clients. In fact, Malay eating places are thronged at night by Chinese who patronize them regularly to enjoy seafood and *satay*, which they consider not only tasty but reasonably priced. Malays who patronize Chinese sundry and other shops feel that they are given a fair deal, because the Chinese shopkeepers charge them the same price as they would charge their Chinese customers. Such interactions are not limited to the marketplace.

Mutual visits during cultural festivals such as the Muslim Hari Raya (at the end of the fasting month) and Chinese New Year are commonplace. Chinese guests who attend Malay weddings are generous with their presents (*angpows*), and they also give donations to Malay religious causes, including for improvements to the local mosque or *surau* (a small Muslim prayer house). On their part, Malays attend Chinese New Year festivals and help their Chinese friends to slaughter chicken and other animals the Muslim way and cook *halal* dishes for Chinese weddings and other functions so that Muslim guests can attend and enjoy the food with a clear religious conscience.[5] Malay community leaders also attend such functions as the opening of Chinese or Hindu places of worship.

The classic case of this new pluralism is Kelantan, situated on the northeast coast of peninsular Malaysia. Kelantan is a predominantly Malay-Muslim state that has been ruled by the opposition Islamic party, PAS, from early in the postindependence period until today. In this state, the Chinese comprise only 5 percent of the population. Although Kelantan has been a major bastion of Islamic resurgence, interethnic and interfaith relations in the state have been generally harmonious. This fact is acknowledged by every one of the informants (Malays and the ethnic minorities—Chinese and Siamese) we interviewed for this study and also by other informants the researcher has interviewed for other studies.[6] The fact that many Kelantan Chinese are able to adapt to the Malay environment by learning Malay, mastering the local dialect, and assimilating some aspects of Malay culture facilitates their integration with Malays. This has been relatively easier because Kelantan Malays do not perceive local Chinese as posing a political or economic threat. On the contrary, Malays here tend to regard political differences in their own ranks on the basis of party affiliation (PAS versus UMNO) as a far more serious concern.

The following cases provide some insights into interethnic and interfaith relations in the state of Kelantan.

Mr. Lee (not his real name), a fifty-nine-year old Chinese businessman and first-generation migrant from mainland China, came with his parents to Kelantan when he was seven and has since integrated himself with Kelantan Malays. His experience shows how a first-generation Chinese migrant developed roots in a predominantly Malay community, learned the Malay language, and adapted to the Malay-Muslim environment. Being a businessman, he uses Malay (Kelantan dialect) most of the time, while at home he speaks Hokkien. Despite being a small minority in a predominantly Malay-Muslim belt, the Chinese in Kelantan, according to the informant's narratives, do not feel persecuted or marginalized even under the PAS government. According to him, "In Kelantan, Chinese-Malay

relations are quite different from other states. . . . Before as a young boy, I stayed in the *kampung* (village), and I noticed that the villagers, be they Chinese or Malays, could live together. In fact, ethnic relations in Kelantan have been good since a long time ago." On interfaith relations, the informant also feels that there is no problem. "Everybody here respects each other's [religion]. They know what Muslims are, what Chinese are, and everybody respects each other. . . . There have never been conflicts [*gaduh-gaduh*] between Malays and Chinese, or between Buddhists and Muslims."

His views are supported by other informants, including those from the small Siamese community in the state. A leader from the Kelantan Siamese Association says: "In general, the Malays here (Kelantan) have accepted us. They regard us as the rightful people here. If there are fights, it is not because of race, but due to personal matters." The head of a Buddhist temple, a senior Siamese monk, confirms this observation. He says that in terms of interethnic and interfaith relations, "there are no problems . . . things are fine."

The above observations and experiences are also shared by Malays, including those from the other end of the spectrum—the more conservative and orthodox Muslim traditionalists. There is the case of a *tok guru*, head of a *pondok* or traditional Qur'anic school. Although disagreeing strongly with mixed marriages—interestingly, even between Malays and Chinese converts to Islam—he nevertheless views interethnic relations in Kelantan positively. He says that Malays, Chinese, and Siamese interact very well in the marketplace. "They are good [to each other]. Malays buy from Chinese, Chinese buy from Malays. The Siamese do the same. . . . This was [the situation] before and it is the same today."

Summing up interethnic relations in the state, a young Malay cultural activist puts it this way: "I feel the races in Kelantan are all fine. For example, the Chinese, they are nice people. We can make friends with them (because) they understand the Kelantan dialect. So, we can be friends, and can even go in and out of their homes." To the informants, the main issue that has plagued Kelantan for many years is not ethnic differences, but conflicts between the state and federal governments, and among the Malays themselves because of differences of party affiliation. The split among the Malays mirrors the fight between the dominant UMNO, which holds the reins of power in the federal government, and the PAS-led state government. The contrast between the two parties is a class issue as well as one of governance.

Similar views are expressed by informants from the religious sector, especially on the universality of religious teachings about humanity and

on the ability of different religions to live together peacefully. Interviews with various representatives from the Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, and Christian faiths indicate that all regard their religions as inclusive and as a sound basis for pluralist tolerance. The views of a Muslim modernist who heads a modern *pondok* in Tanjung Karang, Selangor, are representative. Espousing Islam and ethnoreligious pluralisms, he argues that to achieve his objectives of instilling religious values and morality among members of society, he needs to involve other ethnic groups, especially Chinese and Indians who are Muslims and non-Muslims. To him, "ethnic differences are not important, Muslims of various ethnic groups are the same in terms of their objectives." His religious school (*pondok*) is prepared to accept Muslim students from Chinese, Indian, and other backgrounds. He agrees that while Malay should be the national language, Malays and Muslims generally should also learn other languages (Chinese, Tamil, etc.). He also approves of ethnically mixed marriages, with the qualification that both spouses must be Muslims or become Muslims. Citing the religious basis of cooperation between Muslims and non-Muslims, he argues that Islamic *sunnah* (teachings based on the life and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) "has shown the way how it can be done." His *pondok* is even prepared to engage non-Muslim teachers to teach non-religious subjects such as mathematics and English. Stressing that he is against religious bigotry among Muslims, he maintains that "people must understand that religion is a person's individual right" and they should forge "common grounds between religions as well as mutual understanding and respect between believers of different faiths."

Similarly inclusive views are echoed by the members of other religious communities. A Buddhist monk put the matter this way: "To Buddhists, all religions—be they Buddhism or Islam—are basically the same. . . . they all want people to be good. There are many ways to becoming good, but the ultimate goal is the same." The adviser of the Sri Satya Sai Baba Association is more explicit regarding the inclusiveness of religion. Espousing pluralist values, he contends that "all religions are one. I'm born a Hindu, but I respect all religions and I think all religions are great." To prove that values in all religions and cultures are the same, he quotes the principles in Hinduism about honoring one's parents and teachers as expressed in the phrase *matha, pitha, guru, deivam*, which means honor one's father, mother, and *guru* (teacher). He also stresses that one of the Ten Commandments in Christianity is to honor one's father and mother. In Islam, he draws attention to Prophet Muhammad's saying that heaven is at the feet of the mother. He explains that the Sai Baba movement is basically an interfaith organization dedicated to service and human values. "(Its)

objective . . . is that the Hindu must become a better Hindu, a Muslim must become a better Muslim, and a Buddhist must become a better Buddhist. Only in this way they can work together for the benefit of society. They must practice human values." However, he contends that religious followers have betrayed "the trust of the religion," because they have not gone to the field and played a role in improving society. His message is essentially the same as that of the Islamic *dakwah* ("predication," "religious appeal") movement: go to the people, spread the message, and educate based on religious principles and values.

The language of inclusion and civility among ethnoreligious groups has made a positive impact not only in ethnoreligious circles but also in the political domain. It may well be laying the foundation for a new public culture in Malaysia. One of our informants, the vice president of ABIM, a leading Islamic youth movement, points to the broad-based coalition that had emerged since late 1998 comprising more than a dozen organizations—political parties, religious groups, and other NGOs—under a multiethnic national body called GERAK to fight for justice and democracy. It should be noted that some months after the formation of GERAK, the four major opposition parties—PAS, DAP, Parti KeADILan Nasional (National Justice Party—KeADILan), and Parti Rakyat Malaysia (PRM)—formed the multiethnic Barisan Alternatif (Alternative Front) to fight against the ruling National Front or BN. Noting the changed perceptions of non-Malays and non-Muslims toward Islamist groups such as ABIM, our informant explains that "Had we talked about Islam within narrow confines, they would probably be afraid of us. But we have made efforts to show that Islam is not exclusive, fanatical, or against cooperation and living in harmony with other religious groups. We've shown that Islam enshrines universal values suited for peaceful coexistence and that the principles of Islam are acceptable and practical to all communities, even for non-Muslims." He maintains that "ABIM's stand on human rights and democracy may have changed the non-Muslim perception toward us. . . . They now regard ABIM as more open and prepared to listen to various views, and that it is not exclusively for Malays."

## Echoes of Old Divides and Divergences

The above discussion is illustrative of the widespread practice of pluralist tolerance among Malaysians as well as attempts at projecting the inclusiveness expressed in religions into new domains. However, tolerance has yet to evolve into open espousal of full participation and integration

among all ethnic groups and religions; similarly, recent attempts at "reaching out" have not yet gained widespread acceptance by the general public. As it is, there are still many contested domains and exclusions on both sides—Malay-Muslims and non-Malay/non-Muslims.

For example, there are strong reservations in some circles about social mixing between ethnic groups, and all the more about mixed marriages. One of our interview informants, the head of a traditional Muslim school (*pondok*) in the state of Selangor, spells out the boundaries when he says that while he is "not against his children mixing with other races in schools, etc., they should be careful to follow their customs and religion . . . otherwise their faith will be ruined." While ethnically mixed marriages may be on the increase in Malaysia, opposition to the practice is also widespread. Although many Malays-Muslims are tolerant of such marriages—provided the prospective non-Muslim partner becomes a Muslim—there are not a few Muslims who disapprove of them despite the conversion of one spouse to Islam. The above informant, for example, regards mixed marriages as "unsuitable because of cultural differences" and claims that "many such marriages have failed." His counterpart, another traditional religious leader (this time from Kelantan), says that mixed marriages "will (only) demean our own *bangsa* [race]." While we may wish to dismiss these views as the parochial sentiments of orthodox members of the older generation, the same views are found among "modern" Muslims of the younger generation. When questioned on this issue, for example, one young Malay-Muslim informant, a professional from the economic sector, expressed strong disagreement with mixed marriages, arguing that "not many who enter into such marriages really adhere to the Islamic way of life after settling down." According to him, this creates serious problems if the Malay-Muslim partner in the marriage dies first since the spouse of the deceased would have difficulties in sustaining the faith, and this in turn would affect the faith of their offspring.

Non-Malays/non-Muslims also have reservations about mixed marriages, albeit for different reasons. The Chinese president of the Kelantan Hokkien Association, for example, although advocating liberal views on interethnic and interfaith relations, does not favor mixed marriages. According to him, marriage is a serious affair and should be lasting. Although he does not mind if a couple comes to live in the same household as the parents, he feels that such arrangements are unlikely to happen in mixed marriages because of religious differences. Reflecting the views prevalent among the Chinese community, he says that when a member of a Chinese family marries someone from another ethnic group or religion, that person is "lost" to the family. With regard to Chinese-Malay

intermarriage, he claims that when a Chinese girl marries a Malay and becomes a Muslim, she "will be gone from the family." Another of our informants, an enlightened Muslim missionary (*pendakwah*) from a mainstream Islamic welfare organization (Perkim), disagrees with this perception on the part of non-Muslims. He explains that such marriages "only involve change of religious beliefs, not a change of culture or one's parents," and stresses that "one's way of life and culture remain the same . . . including respect and love for one's parents and siblings."

However, although stances like this have helped to diminish some of the controversy surrounding mixed marriages, they have not yet put public apprehensions to rest. The reason for this is that, as another informant (a Buddhist monk quoted earlier) put it, mixed marriages in Malaysia are always a "one-way thing." "It is okay for non-Muslims to become Muslims, but not the other way round." One religious reason for this is that Muslim law (*shariah*) does not allow Muslim believers to change religion, since this is considered *murtad*, "apostasy." In light of the delicacy of this matter, the demand by some Islamic groups, namely the political party PAS, for the imposition of the death penalty for apostates has only added to the tension, and generated alarm among non-Muslims and Muslims alike (a point discussed in Zainah Anwar's essay in this book). Because of problems like these, then, the informants in our interviews overwhelmingly prefer marriage to be confined within the same ethnic and religious group to avoid conflicts. As two Christian pastors put it, if there are ethnically mixed marriages, "they should only be among followers of the same faith."

Besides disagreements on the matter of mixed marriages, resentment and suspicion still prevail among Malays and non-Malays in big cities and states where competition occurs between elites from different ethnic groups. Tensions like these are expressed by many informants, especially among Chinese and Indians activists in the peninsula and among the Kadazandusun in Sabah. Criticisms of and dissatisfaction with the New Economic Policy (NEP) also continues to be heard. On one hand, many informants—Malays and non-Malays—see the NEP as a major force for interethnic peace. One Indian informant, a high-ranking official who is also adviser to a spiritual movement, regards the NEP as providing a stake to "everybody" to share the national wealth. "This is the most powerful factor for peace and stability in Malaysia . . . because of the distribution of wealth." His comments on the situation on May 13, 1969, when riots broke out in Kuala Lumpur (see the introduction to this book), are noteworthy. He says, "You can quote me on this. In that incident, Chinese would have cried, one Indian would have cried, but not one Malay would

do so. The Malay may sympathize with others who suffered losses, but he wasn't crying because he did not own anything. But because of the New Economic Policy, if Kuala Lumpur burns today, everybody—Malays, Chinese, Indians, and Others—would suffer. And that's is the most powerful factor for the country's stability."

On the other hand, there is antipathy among several groups, especially Chinese and Indians, toward the NEP, which many people still regard as discriminatory. Our interviews also encountered resentment of the Islamic resurgence movements, which many non-Muslims blame for inhibiting interethnic and interreligious interaction. People agree that the worst episode for interethnic relations the May 13, 1969 tragedy, but many also view the 1980s as a bad period for ethnic relations, inflamed by certain politicians and over-zealous chauvinists. Although ethnic relations improved in the 1990s, many informants feel that interethnic interactions have not "returned to the free and relaxed atmosphere of yesteryear (1940s and 1950s)," as one informant put it (no doubt a bit too romantically), when ethnic consciousness was not a major issue. One Chinese informant involved in human rights NGOs says: "Things are slightly better today than ten years ago, but the law and the policies based on the NEP have not changed. . . . The ideal of an equal society for all ethnic communities in which the poor are helped based on class rather than their status as indigenous people" is still a long way off. An Indian lady pensioner who now works as a social worker criticizes the NEP as being one-sided, "for the benefit of the Malays. That's why the Malays have come up (since) the education system is more for them rather than for us [Indians]." Based on this perception, she concludes that "ethnic relations are not close today . . . a lot of jealousy and prejudices toward one another still exists." A Chinese businessman admits that in his company "there are more Chinese staff," but he is quick to explain that "it does not mean that we target these people." The disparity, he claims, is the result of the fact that *bumiputera* individuals "have better opportunity in government agencies or private-sector companies."

Such divergent views are expressed openly in the state of Sabah in western Malaysia (Borneo), especially by informants from the Kadazandusun ethnic group. The Kadazandusun comprise the largest *bumiputera* community in that state, but are a minority indigenous group nationally. As beneficiaries of the NEP, they do not blame this policy for the rise in ethnic consciousness, but they point their finger at ethnopolitics and religious revivalism. As with many informants in peninsular Malaysia, many Sabah informants acknowledge that ethnicity was not a factor during their "growing up years," but it is a hot issue today because it has been used in

political mobilization. A seventy-three-year-old Kadazandusun informant who has been a prominent figure in public service sums up the issue this way: "In Sabah we are more cosmopolitan in terms of ethnic composition and everybody must learn to live with one another. In former days, ethnicity did not mean anything and I never saw it as a factor. But politics got dirty nowadays . . . highlighting racial issues. . . . and fragmenting people." This view is shared by another informant, a forty-four-year-old Kadazandusun activist, who agrees that the situation was far better before, "as the people were not polluted by politics." While the first informant attributes the rise of ethnic consciousness to ethnopolitics, the latter puts the blame on religious revivalism and over-zealous religious propagandists. According to him, "in earlier times, people from various ethnic groups used to work together and eat together. Nowadays, it is different . . . people are more polarized along religious lines and this makes it difficult for some people."

In the economic domain, despite the trend of interethnic convergence or complementarity noted earlier, there is also a trend of confining certain activities to members of one's own ethnic group. Many Malays, for example, feel that despite the NEP and the "smart partnership," they still have a long way to go, and one way to "catch up" is not just to rely on the government, but to strive on their own apart from other ethnic groups. This view is especially common among certain members of the younger generation who are more aggressive on ethnoreligious matters. They argue that they must take bold initiatives to uplift their lot to achieve what they call "ethnic balance" by enlarging "the Malay middle class." A forty-five-year-old informant, for example, dedicates his company to that objective. Criticizing the employee-mentality of many Malays, he argues that Malays must dare to be self-reliant, and that improvements in the Malay lot cannot be left to individuals alone, but must be done through collective efforts. He maintains that he is not being "communal or ethnicist" by adopting such an approach; it is just that he wants to focus on the Malays to achieve "ethnic balance." Once this balance is achieved, he would widen it to all Malaysians. A young Malay professional from the economic sector who grew up in Kampung Baru, Kuala Lumpur (site of some of the worst rioting in May 1969), also expressed concern for improving the economic lot of the Malays. Reflecting the sentiments of the generation who experienced the trauma of the riots, he readily admits that he has suspicion toward other ethnic groups, namely Chinese. "We have been brought up that way because of May 13," he says. He maintains that "On the surface we can cooperate with the Chinese in economic matters in the interest of the company. . . . But, there is the problem of fairness. If you're a

Malay and your boss is a Chinese, you doubt whether he's going to upgrade you when it comes to end-of-year promotion."

Based on the analysis of new solidarities as well as the contestation and divergences above, many informants' impressions seem not far off the mark when they welcome the interethnic peace and harmony prevailing in Malaysia today, but also express the feeling that Malaysia still has a long way to go in transforming itself into *bangsa Malaysia* or "Malaysian people." As a young Malay social activist working in Kuala Lumpur candidly puts it, although there is harmony, it is founded on the basis of toleration, not so much on civility and mutual reciprocity. "People are taught to tolerate the system, and tolerate each other, but under our breath, we sometimes say racist remarks." This view resonates with that expressed by the Chinese president of the Pure Life Society, a Chinese religious organization. He maintains that the unity Malaysia currently enjoys is born "out of necessity . . . it is unity for survival," unity that is "instrumental, calculative and artificial," and not "unity of the heart."

## Underprivileged Ethnic Minorities

Another important dimension of pluralism in Malaysia that requires further analysis is the problem of minority groups. In this section, we focus on two such groups: the Orang Asli and the Siamese. They, too, are fighting today for their economic, political, and cultural rights, especially the right to maintain their identity as they struggle against deprivation and marginalization. With heightened consciousness, partly enhanced by globalization, these minority groups demand empowerment and civility as equal partners in nation-building and market expansion in the country. The voices expressed by these groups indicate clearly that it is very important to grasp the logic of the underprivileged ethnic minorities if pluralism is to become a resource for genuine civility and participation.

### *Orang Asli*

Peninsular Malaysia's Orang Asli (literally, "the original people," but the term typically refers to non-Muslim and non-Malay indigenes in forest and upland regions of the peninsula) currently number over ninety thousand (Nicholas 1998). For centuries, they have suffered marginalization from Malay society, and they remain one of the poorest communities in the country. Many still live in the jungle or on its fringes, without regular sources of income, although some have moved to towns to work in urban

jobs. Only a very few have joined the ranks of the middle class. In terms of administration, the Orang Asli are under the purview of the Department of Orang Asli Affairs, set up during the period of British rule and today under the Ministry of National Unity and Social Development.

Conscious of the need for an organization to champion their interests, a few leading elements in the community have set up the Peninsular Orang Asli Association (Persatuan Orang Asli Semenanjung Malaysia—POASM). It currently claims a membership of sixteen thousand. POASM's main concern is how to empower the Orang Asli to share equal opportunities with other ethnic groups. The community is represented in parliament only by one senator (a nominated post) in the upper house. To draw attention to their plight, POASM has established networks with other indigenous groups the world over in an effort to share experiences and devise strategies for common goals.

From the interview with POASM's president conducted for this study, one can clearly appreciate the logic of this underprivileged minority. To him, two major issues need immediate solution: land titles (at the moment most Orang Asli do not have individual land titles) and education. Recognizing that higher education is the route to social mobility and that the Orang Asli are educationally backward, he wants special consideration in the form of a quota system in high schools and universities like that implemented under the NEP for Malays. As he puts it, "If we have to wait for our children to get Grade One [in the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia or the Malaysian Certificate of Education examinations], they will never get a place in the university."

Expressing his people's frustrations, he says that "Ever since I was young, I wanted change, for we don't want to be like our parents, poor and illiterate. I want to be a knowledgeable person." But he claims that "since small, I noticed that nobody really cared for the problems of the Orang Asli." Worse yet, he feels that the other communities, including the Malays, "look down upon the Orang Asli as low class." He claims that it is his consciousness of this problem that led to his involvement in POASM to change the state of affairs because "I don't want future generations to suffer the same way my generation did." He regards his work in POASM as having achieved some results. "Within the organization we can exchange views, and inculcate the importance of education. Now, there is some awareness of education's importance among the community."

However, he regrets the perceived lack of support and understanding from the government and the other ethnic communities for his struggle. Without support from the government bureaucracy and from other ethnic groups, he laments, "How can the Orang Asli progress?" Reflecting his awareness of the need for full citizenship participation for minorities,

he argues that the Orang Asli are disempowered, for they do not have real and effective representation in decision-making bodies. As he puts it, "We do not have political representation, we don't have real power in the government." From his perspective, "only two ethnic groups enjoy the most benefits—the Chinese . . . who control the economy, and the Malays who control politics; and now Indians have begun to enjoy these benefits too."

As with various minorities, this man is concerned with maintaining the Orang Asli identity. Thus, he agrees that while Malay and English should be studied and used, minority languages should also be protected. He stresses the principle of mutual respect and tolerance between ethnic groups, and is against forced assimilation. Being animists, one of the main issues the Orang Asli have to contend with is religious conversion, since they have been the target of proselytizing activities from both Muslim and Christian missionaries. He is not happy with Orang Asli Islamization, not so much because of Islam, but more so because of the practice of the *pendakwah* people (Muslim missionaries) whom he regards as being mainly interested in getting converts, and not in Orang Asli welfare.

### *The Siamese Community*

The Siamese have lived in what is today the northern portion of peninsular Malaysia for hundreds of years, although some in the community are recent migrants. The Siamese are a small group, numbering just sixty thousand people, living mostly in rural portions of the northern states of Kelantan, Perak, Kedah, and Perlis adjoining the Thai border. Unlike the Orang Asli, the Thai are socially and economic advanced, with many of their young having gone to university and pursuing middle-class careers. The Siamese are mostly organized under the Malaysian Siamese Association, which has a headquarters in Kedah. The association is an effective lobby that takes up issues affecting their interests, and channels them to the government through a single Thai senator in parliament. The Malaysian Siamese Association has its local counterparts in the three states. Another important local association for Siamese is the Kelantan Siamese Association (Persatuan Masyarakat Siam Kelantan), whose secretary we interviewed in Kota Bharu for this study. From the interview, a number of issues pertaining to identity politics and interests of the community emerge. These issues have been raised by the Malaysian Siamese Association, who thus far has managed to make considerable progress with state authorities.

According to our informant, the community used to be known as "Thais," but in recent years they have changed their self-designation to Siamese "because people here are confused, thinking that we are from Thailand, living in Malaysia." While this change has helped check the

confusion, some confusion persists. For example, members of the older generation are referred to as "Thais" on their national identity card, while their children are referred to as "Siamese." Conscious of their marginalization, the association objected to the labeling by the authorities who place them under the "Others" category on official forms, and demanded that they be referred to as *keturunan Siam* (Siamese descent). This problem has recently been successfully resolved in application forms for universities.

In addition to problems like these with community identification, Siamese Malaysians also experience problems over their individual surname and first names. In Malaysia, some ethnic groups like the Chinese and Eurasians use surnames, while the Malays use first names separated by the word *bin* (son of) or *binti* (daughter of) before the name of the father in the birth certificate. A similar procedure was adopted in official documents like birth certificates for Siamese, except that the word *bin* was replaced with *anak lelaki* (*a/l*) or *anak perempuan (a/p)*. The Siamese community traditionally used surnames, and was unhappy, then, with this practice and voiced their concerns in parliament. Subsequently, the procedure for recording names was changed, and the Siamese can now use their surnames when registering their children's births. Unfortunately, however, this new regulation is not always respected at the local level.

Another problem, as narrated by our informant, relates to the issue of *bumiputera* status. The term *bumiputera* was expanded after the formation of Malaysia in 1963 to include the indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak, many of whom are non-Muslim. This term became more important with the implementation of the New Economic Policy, especially when it comes to certain affirmative action schemes open only to *bumiputera*. Because of their struggle, the Siamese community, although not accorded the same status, can today participate in unit trust schemes run by National Equity Corporation (Permodalan Nasional Berhad), including the Amanah Saham Nasional (ASN) and the Amanah Saham Bumiputera (ASB), which are otherwise solely reserved for *bumiputera*. At the same time, just as non-Muslim *bumiputera* in Sabah can become UMNO members (UMNO has traditionally been a Malay party), the Siamese in Kedah and Perlis can do the same. Strangely, this does not apply in Kelantan, where UMNO has not opened its doors to the Kelantan Siamese. Although the latter can join the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Gerakan (acronym for Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia or the Malaysian People's Movement, a party that is part of the ruling coalition), many who contemplate joining political parties prefer to join UMNO because of its great political leverage.

Unlike the Orang Asli, the Siamese have the advantage of better education and a rich cultural tradition in Thailand to fall back on for cultural resources. As such, they are more sophisticated in their methods of struggle than the Orang Asli. However, a number of problems persist. For example, a small number of Siamese, especially the illiterate members of the older generation who live in the interior in Kelantan, still do not possess formal citizenship papers. At the same time, there is also the problem of land titles, because in Kelantan, land is mostly administered under the Malay Land Reservation Act, thus restricting other Malaysians' right to own the land. These are among the issues that remain the bone of contention the Siamese community has with the state.

## Conclusion

This chapter has shown that postcolonial nation-building and market-making have impacted Malaysian pluralism in many ways. Although the rich historical resources for pluralism are insufficient to ensure participation and civility in modern multiethnic Malaysia, they nevertheless comprise an important cultural repository crucial in devising a modern and inclusive pluralism. They have been usefully garnered to provide historically-informed cultural meanings to the contemporary changes and transformation as well as in seeking commonalities between different ethnoreligious groups in the making of the modern Malaysian nation. More important, the recent emergence of a multiethnic new middle class, together with enlightened secular and religious intellectuals, has played a vital role in widening pluralist spaces and promoting tolerance and participation. Some sections of the capitalist and middle classes from different ethnic groups still act exclusively or maintain old divides. But the rise of the more enlightened elements among the new middle class is of historical significance. The Malay-Muslim middle class exudes a new sense of confidence as well as a strong mood for multiethnic participation. Based on our study, it is clear that the language of inclusion and civility advanced by the enlightened elements of the middle class, notably its intellectuals and what we might call pluralist mediators, has emerged not only in the market but also in other domains—social, ethnoreligious, and political.

The language of inclusion is making a positive contribution to the evolution of a new political culture that champions universal values such as human rights, democracy, and interfaith cooperation among all Malaysians. In the religious domain in particular, a new thinking and practice of ethnic and religious tolerance is emerging, championed by Islamic

intellectuals, including a number in the established Islamic groups like PAS and ABIM. The major Islamic opposition party, PAS, for example, has of late become more open and inclusive, and has made concessions to other ethnic communities, especially in the two states (Kelantan and Trengganu) it now controls. Given the Malay-Muslim predominance in Malaysian politics, this development has far-reaching implications for the growth of Malaysian pluralism. Should the pro-pluralist elements within Islamic resurgence grow in strength—and the signs indicate that this trend will continue—they can play a vital role in promoting civility and participation in the country.

However, as cautioned earlier, while this new development heralds a positive future for pluralism, one should not romanticize it, for there are serious shortcomings, obstacles, and challenges ahead. Unlike some progressive Islamic movements in Indonesia, such as Nahdlatul Ulama, PAS—despite its progressive postures—continues to send conflicting signals, as seen, for example, in its exclusion of women from leadership roles. As discussed in the essay by Zainah Anwar in this book, PAS's calls for the imposition of *hudud* laws and the establishment of an Islamic state have raised critical responses, not only from non-Malays and non-Muslims, but from Malays. Not surprisingly, then, PAS's partners in the Alternative Front (Barisan Alternatif) collectively agreed to exclude consideration of *hudud* (severe Islamic criminal punishments, including amputation, crucifixion, etc.) and the Islamic state from their 1999 joint election manifesto. Meanwhile, UMNO, in an attempt to reverse the setbacks it suffered among Malays in the 1999 elections, may try to out-flank PAS by becoming more "Islamic." This move could pave the way for a more volatile religious scene.

Nevertheless, another possible scenario is that PAS and the other Islamic groups may continue to develop a language and practice of inclusive participation. Such a development would not only affect their supporters and sympathizers, and be reciprocated by non-Malay/non-Muslim groups, but would also put UMNO on the defensive and make it respond in the same way. Should this happen, it would improve the prospects for multiethnic and multireligious civility, and could reinforce trends toward pluralist participation and cooperation in Malaysia.

## Notes

1. Transnational migration has in fact recently been on the increase. According to official statistics, non-citizens numbered 0.75 million or 4.3 percent of the total Malaysian population in 1991, but their number increased to 1.61 million

or 7.2 percent in 1998 (Malaysia 1999, 96–97). Other sources estimate the foreign migrant-worker population to be higher, around 2 million (Ishak Shari and Abdul Rahman Embong 1998, 69).

2. The PAS president has now assumed the role of the parliamentary opposition leader, a post held by the secretary-general of the Chinese-based Democratic Action Party (DAP) for over two decades.

3. Although we have not incorporated their findings into our essay, our interviews were complemented by another sixty conducted by Athi Sivan and Shamsul A.B. of the Center for the Study of the Malay World and Civilization. Our interviewees included thirty-seven Malays, eleven Chinese of varied dialect groups, eleven Indians, one Sinhalese, one Orang Asli from the Temuan group, one person of mixed Asian parentage, two Siamese, one Bidayuh, one Kelabit, and six Kadazan-Dusun. In terms of region, the vast majority of interviewees are from the metropolitan Klang Valley and the surrounding areas, but those from the outlying regions were also interviewed to reflect experiences and views from the non-metropolitan areas. For example, from the predominantly Malay belt in PAS-ruled Kelantan on the northeast coast of peninsular Malaysia, seven informants from three ethnic groups were interviewed, while to reflect the experiences and views from east Malaysia, sixteen informants—eight each from Sarawak (mainly from Kuching) and Sabah (mainly from Kota Kinabalu)—were also interviewed. By age and experience, the informants range from those of the older generation, the oldest being in their seventies, to a few young activists in their mid-twenties; these individuals are regarded as "landmarks" or "signposts" to reflect the experiences, sentiments, and idealism of their respective generations.

4. As noted by Hefner in the introduction to this volume, "Ali-Baba" partnerships are arrangements in which a Chinese businessperson seeks a Malay to be his or her partner because of the affirmative policy privileging the latter. In this relationship, Ali (a common Malay name) would become a sleeping partner, while Baba (meaning the Chinese businessperson) would become the de facto owner and manager of the enterprise.

5. Performed in accordance with Islamic dietary prescriptions.

6. In the November 29, 1999 election, PAS not only won in Malay areas in Kelantan, but also captured the Chinese-dominated constituency of Kota Bharu, the state capital. A few Chinese in Kota Bharu interviewed after the PAS victory feel that it was well-deserved. They regard the PAS candidate (a Chinese Muslim) for Kota Bahru as a "good man, who helped solve many long-standing problems the people had been facing since the time of the BN government." Many Chinese have also been impressed with the unassuming style of the Kelantan Menteri Besar (chief minister), Nik Aziz Nik Mat, who not only refused to move into his official residence but also took a voluntary paycut when assuming office in 1990. To many Kelantan Malays and Chinese, he is a symbol of religious piety, honesty, humility, and benign tolerance, a person who is seen as corruption-free and does not discriminate against people based on ethnic differences. This positive attitude toward PAS is also found among the Chinese in Trengganu. A Chinese informant,

a small businessman in the state capital, Kuala Trengganu, whom the writer interviewed a few weeks after the general election, opines that many Chinese in the state can accept the newly elected PAS government because "the Islam PAS is championing is quite different from the one before." At the same time, he draws attention to the promise of transparency and accountability made by the PAS government and the fact that it has granted a number of concessions to the Chinese community, including allowing the earlier-banned pig-rearing in the state, restoring the name of "Kampung Cina" (lit., "Chinese Village") to the China-town quarter in the state capital, and appointing representatives of the Chinese community and the Chinese-based DAP into the Majlis Syura Rakyat (People's Consultative Council).

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# 3

# Social Pluralism in Singapore

*Chua Beng Huat and Kwok Kian-Woon*

Looking at Singapore from the vantage point of its political structure, little appears to have changed in the past forty years since the People's Action Party (PAP) first came to power. The same political party remains in absolute control of the parliament. The party, the government, and the state have for all intents and purposes melded into an undifferentiated unity. Cabinet ministers and members of parliament (MPs) are drawn from the uppermost ranks of the civil service, military service, and occasionally the private sector. The concentration of political and managerial power persists alongside the liberalization of the economy to foreign investment, integrating Singapore ever more tightly into global capitalism and, at the same time, greatly improving the material life of Singaporeans across all strata. These concurrent developments appear to frustrate all those who assume that economic development leads inevitably to the democratization of the polity. What is left out by this vantage point, however, is the society itself.

With about four decades of continuous economic growth, despite occasional hiccups, Singapore society has inevitably become much more complex. Education and employment opportunities have expanded. Incomes have risen dramatically across the board but also have become more differentiated. In short, a class society has emerged with people in different sectors facing different life chances and exercising different lifestyle choices. Put simply, there is not only greater economic and social stratification, but greater differentiation among citizens according to own-

ership of different kinds of cultural capital. The new social complexity has serious implications for the way society is governed and for the politics of nation. The PAP government is cognizant of this complexity. The party's ideological and administrative strategies are premised on attempting to "simplify" this social complex into manageable "imaginary" unities. This strategy was clearly exemplified in the 1991 attempt at inculcating "Shared Values" and the 1999 initiative known as "Singapore 21" aimed at instilling a sense of civic belonging and nationhood. In each instance, the complexity is reduced to simplistic, bite-size statements, such as, "nation above community, community before self," or "every Singaporean matters." The details that are subsumed under these slogans, when the latter are translated into policy frameworks and policies, are typically left unspecified.

This essay, based on interviews with active participants in various spheres of public life, will attempt to map out some of the social complexities that have emerged beneath the simplistic official pronouncements of social "unity" in a multiracial and multireligious society. We have divided the public sphere in Singapore into the following relatively identifiable and specifiable segments, which will be examined consecutively without any particular rank ordering: the theater community; voluntary welfare associations; women's associations and feminist voices; the Muslim community; the Tamil community; Christian and Buddhist groups; Chinese-educated intellectuals; the gay voice; "the working committee," a network of young civil society activists; and the Roundtable, a political commentary group.

For ease of handling the interview material, we examine each segment in terms of, first, similarities or general views within it, second, internal differences, and third, the interaction among units in the segment. But before we proceed with the description of the present, we offer a brief introduction to Singapore's past as a pluralist multiracial society.[1]

## Pluralist Social Organization by Colonial Neglect

Established as a trading post for the East India Company in 1819 and subsequently as a key part of the British Empire in Southeast Asia, Singapore attracted migrants from different parts of Asia but predominantly China, India, and the neighboring islands of Southeast Asia. The population has always been multiethnic or multiracial, with the Chinese migrants very rapidly establishing their demographic predominance soon after the trading settlement was set up. Indeed, to return to a concept discussed in the introduction to this book, Singapore was the quintessential Furnivallian

plural society. There was a relatively impermeable economic division of labor along ethnic lines and physical proximity of the administratively classified "races" did not translate into social integration; transactions across ethnic lines were largely economic. Spatially, ethnic communities lived in relative isolation from each other in their respective enclaves.

The colonial government had minimum concern for the daily life of the races. Apart from maintenance of general social order through direct repression, it neglected the collective needs of immigrants, leaving each group to fend for itself. What few social services it provided were in accord with administrative and economic exigencies. For example, limited opportunities for English-language education were provided to satisfy the need to fill the lower ranks of local civil service and commercial activities. Not surprisingly, this negligence by the colonial government spawned strong community initiatives among the three main racial groups to provide for their own collective needs.

At the local community level, in either Malay *kampungs* or Chinese squatter areas, the most ubiquitous community establishments were religious institutions, such as mosques and Chinese temples, and the respective vernacular primary schools. Such activities were initiated by the handful of better-offs among a population relatively homogeneous in its poverty. These groups, acting as "boards of directors," would cover the remaining financial needs, for both building and operational costs, after general collections of donations from the village were taken. Other collective needs of the local community were cared for in a similarly rudimentary manner. Beyond the local community, the collective needs of the ethnoracial group as a whole were also managed by voluntary efforts.

Among the Chinese, for example, higher levels of collective needs were provided for by clan associations. These were organized along cross-cutting criteria of surnames, villages, counties and districts, dialects, and occupations; each criterion was given "quasi-kin" status. The range of social welfare activities provided by these clans was extensive: ancestral temples and burial grounds, primary and secondary schools, financial aid to the destitute, and settling of disputes. Together they comprised a social structure of governance, within which the daily lives of Chinese in Singapore were reproduced, with minimal intervention from the colonial government. Even so-called secret societies provided a governance mechanism for the coolie industry and other aspects of immigrant social life, although they were outlawed by the colonial government by the turn of the twentieth century (Kwok 1998).

The layers of voluntary associations with their varying degrees of formal organization developed, then, as a result of colonial neglect. This

neglect encouraged the parallel development of community structure among the three racial groups, thus keeping the groups apart from each other, without developing a sense of common destiny. What political orientations and intentions they had were directed at their respective countries of origin rather than at Singapore as a coherent political entity.

The idea of Singapore as part of Malaya became imaginable only after the Second World War. The British defeat at the hands of the Japanese during the war and the winds of decolonization in Asia and Africa had stimulated anti-colonial feelings and local politics for the first time. There are a number of detailed accounts of the political struggles of the postwar era, which saw the rise of the People's Action Party (PAP) to a position of power (Drysdale 1984; Bloodworth 1986). It may suffice to provide a brief outline here.

During the early 1950s, apart from fledgling political parties, the most important civil society organizations to emerge that cut across racial divides were the trade unions.[1] They mounted industrial action against employers for the betterment of the workers, many of whom were employed only irregularly. Public sympathy for the unions was readily available because of the prevailing conditions of poverty among the working class and the increasingly stagnant trading economy. To the extent that industrial actions disrupted the routine functioning of the economy, they intruded into the limited political sphere of the colonial regime. The most disruptive cases of conflict were riots that pitted workers and their sympathizers against the colonial police in violent confrontation.

Concurrently, another front of the radical politicization of the population emerged in the Chinese Middle School Students Union. Several ideological and social elements coalesced to engender this group's radical disposition. Having studied under teachers who were influenced by the modernist May Fourth movement in China, the students were uplifted by the success of the communist revolution in China and the general "moral" appeal of communism. Economically, the Chinese students were grossly disadvantaged by the colonial regime's emphasis on English education. However, the immediate catalyst to their radicalism and organization was the colonial regime's expressed intention, in the early 1950s, to conscript these disenfranchised youths into "national" military service. The students' protests gave rise to the establishment of the Union, which was, not surprisingly, determined to remove the colonial regime.

The unionized workers and the politically mobilized students were to find common cause in their anti-colonialism. Together they provided the mass base for progressive anti-colonial politics and political parties. It was in this context that the PAP was forged as an "unholy" alliance of

English-educated professionals and Chinese-educated unionists and grassroots leaders. Positioning itself as a mass-based party, the PAP gained political majority and thus parliamentary power in the very first election of a "self-governing" legislative assembly in 1959. From then on, the project of nation-building began in earnest. The project involved a two-prong strategy of, first, marginalizing and eliminating political opposition to the PAP, and, second, industrializing the economy with both foreign and state-owned capital. Put simply, the PAP dedicated itself single-mindedly to the pursuit of national economic growth, a success that is by now a well-told tale. We limit our remarks to the effects these processes have had on the development of civil society.

## Nation-Building and Market-Making

As a popularly elected government, especially after political independence in 1965, the PAP government had to assume the responsibilities of running a fledgling "nation." Among the duties was the provision of public or collective consumption goods, such as education, health care, and other forms of social welfare. State agencies took over the provision of many of the collective goods that used to be provided by ethnic-based voluntary welfare associations. Among the most urgent and impressive was, of course, massive improvement of the housing stock through a public housing program. At the same time, all schools, whether government-financed or community-funded, were progressively brought under the direct jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. The curricula were standardized to reflect local society, regardless of the medium of instruction. Four official languages were also recognized: Mandarin, Malay, Tamil, and English. This brought some order and standardized quality to education. It was not until 1978, however, that the schools were brought under a unified "national system," with English as the medium of instruction and each student's "mother tongue"—Mandarin, Malay, or Tamil—relegated to the status of a second language. To ensure that second-language competency is minimally maintained, a pass in the second language is necessary for entrance to local universities.

The development and impact of education and language policies have been extensively discussed by Puru Shotam (1998). In particular, the use of English as the primary medium of instruction was ostensibly because of its perceived status as the language of commerce, science, technology, and industry. Apart from the sensitivities of resident Malays and Indians, the geopolitical location of Singapore would not have allowed Mandarin to

be used as the main language of education without incurring negative reactions from the neighboring countries. However, the priority placed on English was not without its political and cultural consequences. The policy effectively marginalized the learning of the three respective Asian languages, thus reducing serious academic interests in their respective cultures among students and, eventually, the population at large. It also disadvantaged those with low competence in English, thus creating serious social divisions between language groups, whether or not coextensive with ethnic groups.

In the provision of collective goods, the state began to meet the expanding needs of the population, often doing so more effectively than voluntary associations. In so doing, the state began to displace the latter to the margins of the population's daily life. Vibrant, ethnic-based voluntary organizations began to atrophy; private school boards disappeared. Clan associations were reduced to maintaining annual festivals and rituals. Social welfare agencies were brought under a national organization, the National Council of Social Services. Each sphere of social life fell increasingly under the jurisdiction of a ministry of state and its myriad rules and regulations. On the political front, the unions were brought under the umbrella of the state-sponsored National Trades Union Congress. As for student politics, the absorption of schools into the embrace of the Ministry of Education eliminated all student politics in secondary schools. The last vestige of student politics at the tertiary level ended in the early 1970s, with its leader seeking exile in London.

In addition to the expansion of state intervention and the resultant concentration of power in the state machinery, there was also the near-total elimination of effective electoral opposition after 1968, when the last plausible opposition party, the Barisan Socialis (Socialist Front), boycotted the general election, leaving the PAP with absolute power in parliament for the first time. The repressive mechanisms deployed on the way to the achievement of this total control of the society and polity is a constant source of "hearsay" reminders circulating among the population, with commonly expressed fears of the dangers of being oppositional. The year 1975 marked the establishment of this state of affairs, when Singapore was described by one its leading political scientists as an "administrative state," where politics had all but disappeared (Chan 1975).

Meanwhile, the culture of industrialization had to be propagated and inscribed onto a population who had hitherto been used to unemployment, underemployment, and irregular employment. Massive cultural relearning was required if such a population were to be transformed into a proletarianized industrial workforce to feed the economic development program.

Apart from deradicalizing and remobilizing workers and expanding training and education opportunities, other cultural values needed to be put in place. Employment and the betterment of material life were elevated as the highest values. Once the basic needs had been achieved, educational achievement, hard work, and individual merit became the basis of further expansion of material life. From the mid-1970s on, endemic unemployment was erased and full employment achieved. On the surface, the entire population seemed to just keep their heads bowed, nose to the grindstone, at one with the state, in the pursuit of economic growth and a better life within the ever expanding yet receding horizon of a globalized culture of consumption. Singapore was plugged into this culture as a tourist-shopping destination and Singaporeans as consumers and tourists themselves. At one point the prime minister pronounced without irony, "Life is not complete without shopping!" (*Straits Times*, August 18, 1996).

Yet, this picture of a consumerist and politically acquiescent population within an arrested state of political development belies what has been happening in Singapore society since the late 1980s. As mentioned above, economic growth has spawned a socially, economically, and culturally differentiated society. The individualistic ethos implicit in the official ideology of meritocracy produces not only materialistic desires but also, at an abstract level, a desire for individualism and individuality in identity. This desire for individuality, coupled with the financial and material resources to realize it, has produced different and complex consequences in the life-choices Singaporeans make for themselves.

Ironically, it is this expression of individuality, which emerged in part because of the state's emphasis on individual meritocracy, that the PAP government tried to restrain in its formulation of the national ideology of "Shared Values" in 1991. This program sought to place nation, racial community, and family above individuals as the desired units of social organization and societal values (Chua 1995). Disparate at the individual level, the population's decisions slowly gave rise to new collectivities bearing similar dispositions. We now provide a description of some of these groups before examining their social and political implications for Singapore's future.

## Theater Community

In the past ten years, Singapore theater has expanded significantly. It is no exaggeration to say that one could watch a new play almost every week in Singapore, of varying degrees of professionalism and in different lan-

guages. This expansion is in part the result of the government's support for the arts as part of its own development agenda. With the country's standard of material life already very high, the government has become anxious about the next phase of political and economic development. Politically, it is concerned that Singapore may not be able to hold on to "nationalist" sentiments and commitments from the younger and more globally mobile professional citizens. Economically, entering into the next phase of economic growth, the government is aiming to place itself in the niches of financial capitalism and information technology. To do so successfully, it feels it needs to bring in the high-end professionals who constitute "foreign talent." It supposes that in order to make Singapore attractive to these hired hands, the entertainment sector of the country needs to be improved and Singapore should become an international "cultural" center. The government has earmarked up to $1 billion to be spent over a five-year period on building infrastructure for this "cultural" development. The local theater groups have, of course, benefited from this promotion. The most significant benefit is the up to 90 percent subsidy on premises rented to established groups by the National Arts Council (NAC).

Every artistic director of a theater company we interviewed is concerned with inadequate funding for its activities, which explains why only one company in Singapore is able to provide a "living" wage for its full-time actors while the rest depend on part-time, underpaid ones. Against this backdrop, some complain that the government is focusing its expenditures in the arts on "glamorous" projects rather than helping to engender local talent by developing theater spaces and securing adequate wages for actors. Understandably, the companies with the largest annual operating budgets are more sensitive to the funding issue than the smaller ones. The Substation, an "alternative" exhibition and training space for different artistic practices, is a case in point. Finding $800,000 annually is a constant struggle, with the NAC assisting with only one-eighth of the amount.

However, each company is able to find its own means of survival. One source of income is the Theater-in-Education program, in which theater groups bring their works and perform or develop workshops with interested students in upper-end secondary schools. However, none of the companies, except the Malay-language Teater Kami, seems to be overly concerned with funding; most seem to take it one step at a time. Indeed, the artistic director of the Mandarin-speaking company, Theater Ox, appears to have infinite faith that when money is really needed somehow it will be available. The company has been quite successful in obtaining assistance from the Lee Foundation, established by the founders of the Overseas Chinese Union Bank.

On the whole, theater as an artistic practice has maintained a reflective and critical attitude toward the social and political developments in Singapore. All respondents interviewed comment articulately on their relationship to the state, particularly agencies such as the NAC, which provides financial support, and the Censorship Board, whose prior approval used to be absolutely necessary for a company to secure a public entertainment permit. However, in the early 1990s, companies with established performance records have been exempted from submission for censorship review. Different companies have read this exemption differently. It has been read as permitting greater freedom or alternatively, as the government's strategy to encourage self-censorship by the companies. Consequently, companies deal with this exemption differently. In the case of The Necessary Stage, a ten-year-old company, scripts are still sent to the censorship authorities, so that self-censorship can be avoided and censorship remains in the hands of the state agencies.

Indeed, one should expect this community to be among the most articulate commentators on social, political, and economic conditions. The critical attitude of the theater community can be seen in the thematic and formalistic substance of the plays produced. At the thematic level, some recent examples include *The Spirits Play* by the Practice Theater, in Mandarin, in which the horrors of war during the Japanese Occupation in Singapore were narrated through consecutive monologues of five ghosts in the Japanese cemetery in Singapore. That the war was driven by a militarist government in the name of Japanese nationalism and the politically constructed fear of being a besieged nation, in the late 1930s and early 1940s, implicitly comments on contemporary nationalism in Singapore.

Another production, *Completely With/Out Character*, by The Necessary Stage, is an English-language one-act-one-man play that showcases the life of an actual gay AIDS patient in the face of the homophobic tendencies of the Singapore state. Here is an interesting, perhaps uncomfortable, meeting of an interest of the state with the theater company's own interest in cutting through the silence that surrounds gay life. The government in the interest of AIDS prevention has been sponsoring advertisements on local television. These ads tend to be very homophobic in that AIDS is rendered as a heterosexually transmitted infection which involves a man in casual sex with a woman, implicitly a prostitute, with the dire consequence of destroying his family life. Abstinence is thus represented as the way to prevent AIDS. By showcasing a gay AIDS victim who professes to having lived a "happy and gay" life, the silence of the individuals that the actor unavoidably represents is broken and placed on a public bulletin board for all those who choose to listen.

In a sense, all the directors of the theater companies interviewed are concerned with the idea of "Singapore" art and identity. The company most committed to this idea is The Necessary Stage. However, not everyone deals with it in terms of domestic conditions. Ong Keng Sen, artistic director of Theaterworks, sees this identity in an international perspective, especially as a "pan-Asian" project, carrying Singapore/Asia to the international audience. This is illustrated by his play, *Lear,* which was staged at the 1999 Berlin festival, after having played in Japan, Indonesia, and Australia. Based roughly on the Shakespearean play, *Lear* was funded by the Japan Foundation Asia Center. It combines the different traditions and languages of Japanese, Chinese, Indonesian, and Thai theaters. Ironically, what is "Singaporean" as such cannot be represented easily, and appeared in the guise of a very minor English-speaking character. The Singaporean directorship of the play may be said to present either a relatively coherent synthesis or an invented pastiche of "Asian elements" that bears some relation to the country's imagined or actual multicultural situation.

In making critical interventions, theater in Singapore appears to have more space than the press, which is constrained by the Newspaper and Printing Press Act to support efforts of national development. Theater also exercises a more critical attitude than existing professional organizations, which are reluctant to provide critical commentaries on the spheres of their professional jurisdiction. Laboring under fears of being called to show cause against possible deregistration, many of these organizations are unwilling to make their criticisms or grievances public, preferring instead to seek closed-door consultations with the relevant government authorities. According to the director of the Substation, the abdication of responsibility by these professional organizations places undue burden on Singapore theater to take up social and political criticism.

However, according to this same director, there are three very large areas that are off-limits to the critical regard of theater. These are issues of race, especially inter-racial relations; issues of religion and interfaith relations; and direct political commentary. These are the areas in which the government has very specific proscriptions, both legal and informal. Race and religion are always considered sensitive areas in which silence is best imposed, lest a given situation become explosive and riotous. Race relations are covered by a Presidential Council on Race, while religion is governed by the Religious Harmony Act. As for "politics," the PAP government has confined it in the most restrictive terms to the activities of political parties. The clear message is that someone who is unprepared to join a political party should not directly comment on domestic political conditions. In this context, artists, writers, and theater companies have

been specifically singled out for explicit warning against "meddling" in politics.

## Voluntary Welfare Organizations

The ideological orientation of voluntary welfare organizations is generally conservative. The directors interviewed for this project tend to take a "philanthropic" view of social welfare work. Welfare recipients are seen as "needy" people who have fallen out of the economic security net and require assistance. This conservative philanthropic tradition, inherited from the British colonial regime, is opposed to the contemporary social democratic or liberal notion that social welfare is necessarily the state's responsibility because the "needy" have become so because of the irrationalities of the capitalist economy. As a result of this conservative orientation, the voluntary welfare organizations are effectively seen as "junior partners" of the state. The prime minister himself has suggested that, in welfare work where emotional connections are necessary, the cold logic of bureaucracy is not as effective as volunteers from the relevant communities.

The PAP government, then, very much welcomes the activities of these organizations. Its philosophy of welfarism is spelled out in the 1990 manifesto, *The Next Lap*, which outlines the "many helping hands" welfare policy. The total social welfare concerns of the nation are to be managed by voluntary organizations (thus "many helping hands") with the government providing funding for infrastructure and a significant portion of operating budget. Hence, the government, particularly the Ministry of Community Development (MCD), might identify areas of needs but it also suggests to some voluntary agencies that they take up responsibilities in such areas, with the necessary infrastructure and funding assistance.

Religious organizations are the ones most often used by the state. The Care Corner, a multipurpose welfare organization under the auspices of the Catholic Church, is a case in point. It is proactive in submitting projects for funding from the MCD. According to a founder member whom we interviewed, the relationship between Care Corner and the government is "very good," meaning that it is mutually supporting and beneficial, as exemplified by the interchanges of staff between the two organizations.

Two issues emerge from this "many helping hands" arrangement. First, there is a perception that the government, through its Ministries of Health and of Community Development, appears to favor Christian organizations, giving them more commissions and a higher public profile. Of course, where the religious affiliation of other target groups matter, the

relevant religious organizations are also invited to take up philanthropic duties. Second, new projects and funding tend to go to larger organizations with track records. This tends to crowd out smaller and new initiatives. In this sense, the process paradoxically works against the rationale of "many helping hands."

The views of the individuals in this sector appear to be divided along several dimensions. One of these is age. Those who are older and have been active in a particular field of work for a long time often claim ownership of the organization in which they are principal actors, as with the managing directors. They would see themselves as "champions" of the cause and have long and illustrious biographies of having struggled for the respective "needy" constituencies. In this sense, they are "organic" leaders who emerge out of the community itself. One such instance is Ron Chandran, who is the long-serving director of the Disabled People's Association. Such ownership of the organization almost guarantees the full dedication of the individuals involved. However, the arrangement has the potential drawback of becoming a "one-person" operation and losing its vitality.

The younger workers in this sector tend to be middle-class, university-educated professionals, trained in social work or some related skill. This latter group tends to be more critical of the character of welfare practices. They are especially critical of the inefficiency of the organization such as the National Council of Social Services. In one particular instance, the respondent criticized the manner in which welfare recipients are used as the "foil" for publicity for MPs and corporate donors. For example, elderly individuals are bused to a large gathering point and made to wait for long period of time for the arrival of the MP before they are given lunch, a package of food items, and a small sum of money; corporate donors of food tend to give items that approach their used-by dates. The overall criticism in this case is that MPs and donors are made the center of attention in such occasions rather than the elderly needy themselves. This of course reflects a "philanthropic" idea where the "giver" of charity is privileged over the receiver.

However, such criticisms seem to be very limited and confined to specific organizations or particular events. On the whole, the voluntary welfare sector lacks any kind of social-structural or macro-analysis of the social and economic conditions that might have been the cause of the social welfare demands. In practice, the working orientation is client-centered, dedicated to doing the best for clients. Consequently, as a young social worker complained, activities are only organized around very identifiable constituencies, rather than larger concerns of the welfare of those who are not

visibly in need, such as counseling of youth or gays, for example. Ideologically, the voluntary welfare organization community has a traditional and moralistic view of social problems. These are typically viewed as the products of an erosion of family and moral values. This is particularly true of those who work with youth, who are represented as "out of control." This ideological understanding of social problems is similar to that of the government. Consequently, the voluntary welfare organization sector is locked into a mutually supporting and beneficial relationship: the state needs the organizations to reach areas of need it is unable to service, while the organizations need the infrastructure and funding resources controlled by the government.

## Women and Feminist Voices

The Association of Women for Action and Research (AWARE) can be said to be the most significant women's group in recent decades, although it no longer appears to have the drive that made it a strong presence in the public sphere in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The current membership remains approximately seven hundred. An understanding of some of the dynamics that propelled the organization over the years can be developed from interviews with Constance Singam. She served two terms as president (1987–1989; 1991–1993), the first term soon after the "Marxist conspiracy," the official label used to refer to the detention without trial of some twenty young Catholic social workers, dramatists, and professionals under the Internal Security Act. Two other members of AWARE were also interviewed: a sociologist who led a subcommittee to develop a new "blueprint" for the society in the mid-1990s and a younger member who joined when she was still an undergraduate and has been a committee member in recent years.

Singam stresses certain crucial aspects of AWARE's early formation, which she felt was an exciting phase for many. First, women's issues represented a sphere of "human values" that transcends race, age, and other forms of identification: they "can transform the way we think about ourselves as a society." Second, AWARE was determined from the start *not* to become a traditional welfare organization but rather an organization that aimed to create public awareness about issues. This tack was adopted in part to counteract the conventional expectation of women as service providers. Third, its members wanted to lobby for change and influence policy in the belief that "committed citizens should have access to the process of decision-making of policies that affect us." Singam herself has

been keen to confront the sense of "helplessness" and "powerlessness" that she senses among many Singaporeans.

AWARE promoted this line of action, on the one hand, by taking on highly specific issues and engaging specific government agencies and individual bureaucrats and, on the other hand, by attempting to raise public awareness. Dealing with an indifferent civil service required persistence and strategic competence. Two examples may suffice: (1) the push for fundamental changes in the way police treated victims of domestic violence and rape, and (2) extending the school home economics curriculum—hitherto only for girls—to boys. Each of these struggles involved legal research, presentations to authorities, use of media, work with sympathetic bureaucrats, and long rounds of negotiations.

Toward the mid-1990s, however, a number of members, especially younger ones, saw the need to chart a longer-term direction for the group; they were asked by the executive committee to set up a subcommittee to work on a blueprint. This, however, developed into a controversy that weakened the group as a whole and remains unresolved to this day. The differences centered on issues relating to newer understandings of "feminism," a term toward which a number of leaders had a limited or even negative understanding. A number of older members did not want to be called "feminist." Moreover, the blueprinters wanted to deepen and widen what they called "conscientization"; this term also created controversy. The blueprinters argued that without the effort to situate AWARE's work within the history of feminism, the organization's advocacy work would not succeed.

Parenthetically, it is of some significance to note that a number of AWARE's founding or older members labored under the fear created by the "Marxist conspiracy," with its arrests and memories of state surveillance. These had led them to exercise caution in projecting their personal and group image so as not to jeopardize the organization. For their part, however, the blueprinters did not carry this baggage and had different ideas as to where the organization should be heading. As it turned out, the blueprinters did not get very far, and rather than getting the organization mired in continued internal controversy—especially when long-standing friendships were also at stake—they decided to work informally on their own in clarifying their issues. For its part, AWARE continued with its staple work such as maintaining its Helpline; it has not been as active in advocacy.

Such tendencies define the tenor of other women's organizations. For example, the Singapore Association of Women Lawyers (SAWL) declares itself a "non-feminist" and "non-advocacy" organization. It sees itself as working with the government on family-based issues, "family problems,"

rather than women's issues as such. This is in contrast to what AWARE represented and, because of its founding legacy, still represents in spite of the lack of mutual understanding and strategy among its varied subgroups.

AWARE continues to attract volunteers, however, especially from the ranks of people who want to be socially active and play a role in community service, without being self-consciously informed by issues related to feminism. An example of such newer members is another interviewee, who became a citizen as a spouse of a Singaporean and works in a national urban planning body. She had been active in the Singapore Environment Council but found this too restrictive because of the potential conflict between her professional interests and environmental concerns. In addition, she found that the group was not active enough. She joined AWARE and managed the telephone hotline. Part of her motivation lies in her belief as a mother that Singapore does not have the "right" environment to bring up children because it is too regulated. She is representative of a sector of the educated middle-class professionals who have found the need to be involved in society in one way or another.

## The Malay-Muslim Community

What is commonly referred to as Singapore's Muslim community is actually rather exclusively the Malay-Muslim community; Indian Muslims are generally excluded or are thought of as a minority. Among the Malay-Muslim community, the major organizations are MENDAKI (Council for Education of Muslim Children), the AMP (Association of Muslim Professionals), Jamiyah (Muslim Missionary Society of Singapore), Perdaus, and Darul Arqam (Muslim Converts Association). Publicly, these organizations operate under the sign of "harmony" and differences between them are usually downplayed.

The most public debate over these groups' differences occurred in 1990 during the run-up to the inaugural conference of the AMP, which was motivated by the organizers' disenchantment with the way the Malay-Muslim community was controlled and represented by PAP Malay MPs. The AMP's founders argued that the Malay MPs were dominated by party interests and the demands of other electoral constituencies and were unable, therefore, to represent effectively Malay-Muslim interests. As a result, the founders felt a new Muslim professional organization was needed to provide an alternative channel of representation. This challenge to the community leadership of PAP Malay MPs was very quickly dissipated, however, by the government's offer to fund AMP at the same level as

MENDAKI. The AMP agreed, and progressively developed the same community services as MENDAKI, such as tuition classes for needy Malay children and skills-training for adults. As a result of this convergence, the two organizations today appear to be very similar. The founding AMP president, who had to relinquish his post due to differences among the leaders, has expressed disappointment about the disappearance of difference that motivated him and others to form AMP in the first place. AMP is now essentially an educational service organization oriented to improving the academic achievements of the Malay community.

The other organizations are more explicitly religious; they also comprised the focus of our research. Jamiyah started as a "theological" association but has increasingly shifted position to undertake social service projects, particularly ones suggested by the government. Like the abovementioned organizations, Jamiyah is keen to provide education services, which include preschool programs, tuition classes, teacher training and development, and information technology courses. In terms of religious education, it provides classes that prepare children for the religious schools, the *madrasahs*; it also offers religious instruction on weekends. Its other social services include legal counseling, free medical service, meals on wheels for the poor, and an annual "exemplary mother" award. An old age home is also under construction.

In the words of a Jamiyah officer, "Education for the young and the adults is of paramount importance in the agenda of Jamiyah. Continuous learning and constant upgrading of our skills and talent levels have become the necessity of the present." These services are in principle available to all and not restricted to Malay-Muslims, and the interviewees emphasize that non-Muslims and members of other religious faiths frequently visit these services. This is consistent with its stance that Islam is a religion for anyone who elects to be a member. Indeed, Jamiyah sees social service work as "missionary" work, or *dakwah*. Jamiyah also uses its education program to develop international connections; for example, it is training a group of Cambodian Muslims in computer skills and has engaged an English-language teacher from Britain.

On Islamic issues, Jamiyah is non-confrontational regarding the propagation of Islamic values. For example, it does not contest publicly the government's promotion of gambling in local football pools or increased off-track betting. It prefers to submit letters to the relevant authorities. These appeals generally receive polite replies indicating that Jamiyah's concerns have been registered. The organization's promotion of Islamic values works primarily through publications, including posters. Mr. Zainuddin, a worker in Jamiyah interviewed for this research, emphasized

that Islamic tolerance, peace, and other values are not "dissimilar" to those promoted by the government.

Women feature significantly in Jamiyah as volunteers to their social service programs. The organization also appears to champion Muslim women's issues, such as the level of alimony for divorcees, which currently may be as low as $2.00 per day. In this connection, Jamiyah regards some of the social customs of Singaporean Muslims as too conservative and inconsistent with Islam. It sees a need in particular to move away from rigid interpretation of the Islamic laws in accordance with just one school of law.

Currently, the most vocal Muslim organization in Singapore participating in public debates is Perdaus. This is an old organization that was revitalized by the energies of young Muslim professionals in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Although the leadership is secular, Perdaus is the most vocal of all organizations when it comes to "Islamic" values; as a result it is perceived in the Malay-Muslim community as a "conservative" organization. Its members average thirty to forty years old, however, and come primarily from the ranks of graduates of polytechnics and universities. Instead of being "conservative," according to one of its leaders (an academic), Perdaus wants to be the new voice in Islam in Singapore. It sees itself as filling a void in the public sphere, as other religious organizations are too close to the government and cannot speak freely in public debates. This accounts for the organization's increased public profile in recent months.

Perdaus sees the Muslim community as having been isolated from the national mainstream and seeks its place in the public sphere as a full member of the multiracial and multireligious society that is Singapore. In this context, it stresses that Islam is a "rational" religion where spaces for argumentation and differences in interpretations exist. Perdaus leaders also observe that the values that Islam holds are not peculiar to it but are shared by other communities in Singapore as well.

To the extent that it seeks to participate in the national public life, Perdaus has made efforts to participate in national events and networks, such as working with the National Youth Council. Like other Malay-Muslim organizations, Perdaus also runs a variety of social and educational services. For example, it operates a child-care center and programs for youth at risk of becoming deviants. Perdaus concentrates its energy primarily on religious education, however; it has recently decided even to provide such lessons on the Internet. Perdaus is also the only organization other than Majelis Ugama Islam Singapore (MUIS) to run a full-time religious school, the Madrasah Al-Irsyad. This places Perdaus in the public eye because the

*madrasah* as an educational institution has been in the limelight. Enrollments in *madrasahs*, of which there are six, have been increasing, driven in part by an influx of young women from Malay professional families. This has caused publicly voiced government concerns, no less than from the office of the senior minister, Lee Kuan Yew. The government's concern is that religious schools do not have a curriculum with the technical subjects students need to be employable and productive. This lack of viability may render them a "burden" on community and society. The Malay-Muslim community has various responses to this criticism, including the defense of the *madrasah* as a means of preserving the Muslim way of life. Nevertheless, MUIS has agreed to reexamine the curriculum and to incorporate more of the curriculum of the national education system.

An officer from Perdaus suggested that six *madrasahs* are too many, if the aim is to produce religious teachers for the community, even though the six institutions are turning away applicants, mostly girls, because of the shortage of places. He is of the opinion that parents are enrolling their daughters in religious education because of the perceived "moral laxity" of contemporary society. Perdaus aims to establish a systematic mechanism by which students' progress in religious education can be monitored and measured. Consistent with its self-perception as a "rationalist" religious organization, Perdaus officers have also commented that religious teachers in some *madrasahs* are too conservative.

The challenge that criticisms like these make to Malay-Muslim institutions has, not surprisingly, given rise to some resentment in the community. The modern and rationalist approach has raised doubts among some parents that Perdaus may be "straying" from Islamic values. In its public self-perception, however, Perdaus insists it is doing anything but that. It was the only Malay-Muslim organization, for example, which publicly cautioned against licensed gambling.

Another Muslim organization that is attempting to introduce more reflective and intellectual input in local Islamic practices is the Darul Arqam. This is a Muslim converts' association, headquartered at the heart of the Malay-Muslim community of Geylang Serai. Consistent with its conversion program, its services include missionary work and religious education. It has introduced an English-language program for a Diploma in Islamic Studies, which offers courses in economic and social political issues surrounding Islam, including the position of ethnic and religious minorities.

The president of Darul Arqam sees the organization as being very different from other Malay-Muslim organizations. He sees it propagating an Islam that is international, befitting the age of globalization, not one that

is parochial and insular. Darul Arqam's role is therefore to change the local image of Islam as "ritualistic" to one that has strong rational and intellectual components. To this end, Darul organizes talks by Muslim and non-Muslim Islamic scholars from abroad. These endeavors have encountered resistance from some Malay-Muslims. Some in particular have questioned the wisdom of inviting non-Muslim speakers because they do not speak from the position of believers. Darul Arqam's response is that the Islam as practiced by many Singaporean Muslims has been too conservative and ritualistic and the community has been unwilling to reexamine its own religious premises and break out in new directions. Darul Arqam's critique that Islam as practiced is not intellectually reflective seems supported in their eyes by the fact that attendance at seminars organized by the Centre for Islamic Research, of which the president of Darul Arqam is honorary chairman, has been small. In this instance, Islam is not unlike other religions in Singapore, in that many people think it sufficient to distinguish "good" believers from "bad," and deep reflection on theological issues is rare.

Although the intellectual grounding of Islam as a religion is being debated within the community of Singaporean believers, missionary outreach to non-Muslims is limited. This is in part the case no doubt because Muslims are obliged to operate under the national credo of multireligious harmony. In practice the credo restricts members of one religion from spreading their teachings to others. Christian churches, too, are explicitly instructed not to actively proselytize among Malay-Muslims.

## The Tamil Community

The Indian community is the smallest of the three "major" ethnoracial groups in Singapore. Of the 7 percent Indians in the total population, more than 80 percent are Tamils. The Tamils are seen by many people as a predominantly working class community. There is indeed a significant class divide between Tamils and non-Tamils in the Indian community. There are also very different positions on the greater society issues, including how to deal with government. According to one interviewee, who has been involved with the Tamil-language issue for the better part of his adult life, many of the caste prejudices are already non-issues among the Tamil here. However, what has kept the community united is the preservation of Tamil as one of the four official languages. The language issue has cut across caste and religious lines. The community is very proud of its ability to preserve the language.

This effort started at the University of Singapore about twenty-five years ago, which still today does not have a Tamil Language Department, whereas it has a very substantial Department of Chinese Language and Literature and a Department of Malay Studies. Our interviewee, currently an academic, did his undergraduate degree in Indian Studies at the University of Malaya. Upon graduation, he joined the Radio and Television Singapore (RTS). This was central to his abiding interest in and championing of the Tamil language. At the time, both radio and television programs in the Tamil language were in the hands of a few Tamil speakers. They were able to use the programs to maintain a formal and classical Tamil language, without the importation of lexical items from other languages. The news programs in Singapore still use this "pure" Tamil language without resorting to the convenience of using English transliterations.

After a stint in RTS, the interviewee returned to the University of Singapore for postgraduate studies. He started the Tamil Language Society among similarly interested students. The society initiated several language and literary events, including the annual conference on Tamil language, publishing its proceedings. It also encourages poetry and prose writing among its members and publishes these items annually. Although the readership and audience base is limited, these efforts have been sustained until today. The success of these efforts is best reflected in the fact that the Tamil used in Singapore has become one of the few globally accepted codes in the Tamil "diaspora" and the code developed here is used in the Internet.

Language preservation is also the one concern that the Tamil community has raised with the education policy of the government. It has lobbied the government to establish a Tamil Studies program at the tertiary level but has consistently met with refusal. The government position is that the number of Tamil university students is too small to justify such a program. Although, in 1999, the National University of Singapore established a South Asian Studies program, this did not quite satisfy the Tamil community. Some in the community see the PAP as a "Chinese" party that does not pay sufficient attention to minority language, in spite of the party's multiracial rhetoric. However, the government has recently agreed to recognize the language training of Tamil teachers who receive their education in Tamil Nadu, India. Prior to this time the government's position was that the standards of such universities were too low to be granted recognition for employment qualifications. This is a minor victory but it does not fully satisfy the demand of the community.

Apart from the issue of language, the Tamil community sees the manipulation of multiracialism itself as a strategy of the PAP government

to keep the population divided and to govern more efficiently. It sees this as especially disadvantageous to minorities like the Tamils, who would prefer that multiracialism be abolished and a "Singaporean" sense of nationhood developed in its place.

## Christians and Buddhists

From the perspective of the sociology of religion, Singapore, a constitutionally mandated secular state, offers a fascinating comparative study of the relation between religion and politics. In light of the strong influence of liberal Protestantism and Latin American liberation theology elsewhere in Southeast Asia, one might expect Christianity in Singapore to have a tense or even confrontational relationship with the Singapore government. One interviewee, a Protestant theologian active in Chinese-speaking circles and in the Chinese media, readily agreed with the assessment that since 1987 (when the "Marxist conspiracy" allegedly involving socially oriented Catholics erupted) Christianity in Singapore has been relegated to the private sphere. The theologian suggested that Protestant circles in Singapore have been keenly aware of movements elsewhere in Asia for "prophetic" or "social ministry." At the same time, however, he remarked, with apologies to his Third World counterparts, that Christians and non-Christians in Singapore live in "far more fortunate" political circumstances, enjoying more freedoms and facing less political and economic hardship. But he was also quick to point out that the sense of civic responsibility "has not been forthcoming" in Singapore. For his part, Christianity is not meant to be confined within the walls of the church, and he has been trying to engage academics and media professionals.

Interestingly, this theologian also sits on the presidential council that is meant to advise the government on cases related to the Religious Harmony Act. Among other things, the council empowers the minister of home affairs to approve the arrests of persons suspected of disrupting religious harmony. Since its formation in 1992, there has not been a single case brought up to the council. This implies, he observed, that "either we have been so harmonious or perhaps the act has been so effective in terms of deterrence."

Christians tend to come from the higher and more educated social strata and also tend to shy away from public involvement. The above theologian remarked that the community still has a decidedly minority sense of itself in Singapore, comprising only 14 percent of the population. Christians also express the fear that if they become more vocal or rock the boat

this may hurt their recent gains and hinder their chances for recruiting converts. There is a sense, too, among some secular intellectuals and less-educated folk religionists of a perceived incompatibility between Christianity and, for want of a better term, "Chineseness."

By contrast, Buddhism, especially although not exclusively of the Mahayana sort, has recently seen significant growth in the number of its adherents, especially among the educated who have become active in Dharma learning, chant sessions, and voluntary social work. Buddhism as a religious type is not known to tend toward social engagement. However, there have been examples of "socially engaged" Buddhism in other parts of Southeast Asia, especially among Theravada Buddhists in Thailand. This type of Buddhism is largely absent in Singapore, as was confirmed in our interviews with leading monks.

One such monk, the head of a large charity conglomerate, was keen to stress that at this stage Buddhist organizations are trying to push beyond the image of the religion as typified by temples and meditation "in the deep forests" and also by the folk idea of appealing to Buddha and Kuan Yin for help and favors. The popular image is fed by media portrayals of the physical prowess and spiritual discipline of Shaoling monks in Kungfu movies and elsewhere. But the idea of appealing to deities has deep roots in folk Chinese "spiritism," or *shenism*. The reverend does not dismiss this activity as inauthentic but sees it as the precursor to a Buddhism more properly grounded in the Dharma and moral actions. In his opinion, this latter view is consistent with his and other Buddhist organizations' involvement in social welfare activities, including the running of a hospital and retirement homes. Buddhist groups like his have been approached by the state, with offers of land and funding for institutions designed to mobilize both professionals and volunteers, as well as a multiethnic and multireligious clientele. Unlike the monotheistic religions, Buddhism is not fueled by an evangelical impulse, and this may help to explain the secular state's willingness to turn to Buddhists for the expansion of social services.

The reverend indicated he does not disagree with the need for a Religious Harmony Act, and sees that there is always the possibility that relations between different religious groups might become problematic, as a result of, for example, Christian evangelizing on temple grounds. He is equally wary of "cult groups" operating under the banner of Buddhism to disseminate "wrongful" teachings. In cases like these, he looks to the state to provide a critical regulatory role.

Asked about the possibility of a more socially vocal Buddhism, the reverend offered two indirect answers. First, he observed that Singaporeans

are trained "to do things according to the law" and also "never to talk about politics." Thus the scenario of monks speaking up or protesting in the streets is "not appropriate" in Singapore. What people should instead provide to the government, he said, is "feedback." Second, however, the reverend also echoed a point raised by the Christian theologian: religion has not been vocal because there has not been significant "injustice." The implication is that religious bodies will be quite prepared to speak up if there are major issues of injustice, as, for example, if the government were to remove the social safety net for disadvantaged people in society.

## Chinese-Educated Intellectuals

The discussion that falls under this rubric can be greatly expanded into a larger work by itself. Suffice it here to portray the broad picture of this historically specific "community," which is indeed internally differentiated. As the rubric suggests, the common basis of people in this circle or set of overlapping circles is the link, direct or indirect, to Chinese-medium education and the use of Chinese as the dominant language of discourse. The groups and generations involved, therefore, can be described in relation to the different phases of the development of Chinese education in the postwar and independence eras. Briefly, the zenith and nadir of the story can be identified as the establishment of Nanyang University (Nantah) in the mid-1950s and its closure in 1980.

The establishment of the first and only Chinese-language university in Southeast Asia, supported by broad sectors of the Chinese population, has a symbolic value, which continues to be recognized by the older cohorts of its graduates. In the eyes of the state, Chinese education at its height represented either China-oriented political radicalism or ethnic chauvinism, both politically undesirable in a developmentalist, multiracial state. In the 1980s and 1990s, although the government made moves toward more extensive bilingual education, English was the dominant school language and many of the older Chinese-educated have lamented what they see as the demise of Chinese education and a decline in standards of Chinese language use.

Against this backdrop, the community as such is defined in addition by a sense of marginalization, not mitigated by the state's promotion of Confucianism in the 1980s. To be sure, the younger members of this community are more highly bilingual and bicultural and carry less of the historical baggage of their parents and teachers. Interestingly, the term *intellectuals* has been used by them across the generations, especially in

reference to those in the vocations of teaching, arts, journalism, and other media, as well as to refer to those who express themselves publicly, and predominantly, in the Chinese language.

This community is a rather tight circle of people who know each other personally, having access to a shared universe of discourse, without necessarily having any political affinity. Contrary to the charges of chauvinism often raised against them, these intellectuals tend in fact to be highly cosmopolitan, having been exposed to the Chinese modernist movements of the century and world literature through the medium of Chinese. The younger generation is plugged into contemporary global culture, not least through the Internet. Many of them engage in literary pursuits, which are not confined to Chinese-language sources. For them, writing is a vocation and many are engaged in publication projects. These intellectuals, young and old, are certainly more cosmopolitan than the traditional Chinese leaders and members of clan or trade organizations and the less-educated, dialect-speaking Chinese. Their modernism and cosmopolitanism also make them feel that they cannot be unproblematically supportive of "traditional Asian values" or the Confucianist discourses promoted by the state.

Interestingly, certain members of the young and old have come together in recent years to organize conferences on the position of the Chinese-educated in Singapore and on the role of intellectuals. These individuals include Nantah graduates of the late 1960s and 1970s and younger alumni from one of the most prominent Chinese high schools, Hwa Chong. In this instance, it is the younger intellectuals who, having some distance from the experience of marginalization, have taken up the task of invigorating Chinese-language discourse. Their efforts, however, could not have occurred without the example and support of older intellectuals in the media and schools. In recent years, too, there have been mutual efforts to bridge the gulf between Chinese- and English-educated intellectuals, especially through the Substation theater (see above) and other initiatives by bilingual individuals.

Other than by generation, the internal differentiation of this community is quite complex. Although marginalized, some intellectuals feel more alienation and are more critical than others who are more conciliatory and work with the powers that be. The most critical appear to be those who have been associated with the leftist politics of the past and have retained their humanistic convictions or those who have established themselves as social commentators. However, most of these individuals tend to be careful in their public interventions. Their critical stance is visible nonetheless in their responses to a number of issues, including (1) the charges of

Chinese chauvinism levied by PAP leaders against opposition leader Tang Liang Hong before and after the 1997 election; (2) the state's subsequent idea of developing a Chinese "cultural elite"; (3) the changes in the Chinese-language curriculum announced in early 1999. These instances need to be analyzed in detail, but a partial way of summarizing the thrust of such analysis is to say that there is tremendous skepticism toward the state's efforts at cultural engineering. These critics take culture seriously, and feel that culture should not be trivialized and politicized by the state such that, in raising cultural concerns, the Chinese-educated should not be so quickly tarnished by the label of chauvinism.

## The Gay Voice

Interviews were conducted with one of the co-founders of People Like Us (PLU) and two members of Action for AIDS (AFA). PLU was started as a support group and meeting ground for gays at a time when there was a developing sense of gays as a community facing its own social and political issues. Foremost among the issues is the lack of public awareness and public acceptance of homosexuality. As a support group, however, PLU provided a forum for gays to talk about the difficulties of "coming out" and "frivolous issues like how to stay young and beautiful"—and simply to have fun.

As the network grew, members attempted to get the organization formally registered. However, they were quickly told by officials that registration would not be possible. As a result the organizing effort today continues only at an informal level. This has achieved mixed results. On the one hand, a vibrant virtual community has developed, with upwards of six hundred participants (including foreigners) and lots of interaction and discussion on the Internet—a phenomenon that has been studied by an openly gay journalist who writes primarily for the Chinese-language media. On the other hand, regular face-to-face conferences have become less common. Recent PLU conferences have nonetheless attracted up to 120 people and were notable for their strong lesbian presence. They involved discussion of issues of special concern to the community, for example, prospects for legal decriminalization of "homosexual acts."

PLU, although not a registered name, continues to be a rubric that represents the loose network of gays. Its utility in providing support and a channel for gays to meet other gays is not to be underestimated. In this sense, the community has carved out a space of its own in society and in cyberspace, but remains far from the Singaporean mainstream. Having a

space to talk about personal problems, however, does little to address public discrimination and prejudice.

In contrast, AFA cannot be considered as a gay voice as such. Apart from the fact that it counts many heterosexuals among its members and supporters, its approach has been to delink AIDS and homosexuality, a relationship that some observers regard as highly problematic for its work in AIDS education. Members of the group are keen to do battle with the lack of public information on the epidemiology of AIDS and the general avoidance of the issue even among medical practitioners. Along with its humanitarian commentaries on illness and suffering, the AFA has generated a highly "medicalized" discourse on AIDS. Sexuality is not totally avoided; for example, its publications contain tips on how oral sex can be made safer through techniques and devices. On the whole, however, the politics of sexuality is avoided. Key issues such as the marginalization of homosexuality in public discourse, not least in relation to AIDS prevention and treatment are, in effect, bypassed.

## "The Working Committee"

In February 1999, a civil society group emerged around an open forum on "sexual minorities," a code term for gays and lesbians. The public forum was announced and passed along through Internet by e-mail. The group that was responsible for the organization of the forum came to be called "the working committee," or TWC. This forum on sexual minorities was a coming-out event in two senses. First, some of the panel speakers and many in the audience were making their gay/lesbian status known publicly for the first time and, second, it was also the first public announcement of TWC as a civil society network.

The name of the network is significant. Under the Societies Act in Singapore, all organized voluntary associations have to seek registration from the Registrar of Societies. To do so is not only to attract official attention but also to run the risk of being denied registration, which the Registrar has the right to do without explanation. Once registration is denied, the group has to cease all organized activities or face criminal prosecution. As stated earlier, this was the fate of the gay group called People Like Us, which was denied registration in the mid-1990s. By calling itself "the working committee," the network constituted itself as working toward a formalized association and will presumably seek registration in some future date. This temporary status allows the group to meet without running afoul of the Societies Act. However, since it is not a registered group,

it is also not permitted to organize public forums. As a result, its activities have to be done through other registered non-government organizations (NGOs).

In addition to forums, TWC worked with the executive committees of NGOs that desire greater public awareness of their presence to organize an "open-house" for the NGOs. Through such events both the NGO and TWC obtain public exposure. Some of the participating NGOs include AWARE, Action for AIDS, Singapore Environment Council, The Necessary Stage (a professional theater group that is committed to dramatizing local social concerns), and Sintercom (Singapore Internet Community), a website on Singapore affairs, which carries a web page for TWC. Issues concerning TWC have been publicly debated on the web page.

Membership in TWC is ad hoc and by self-election. Individuals ask to be on the group's mailing list, or go to committee meetings in some public place like a food center or restaurant. Events are suggested to the committee by individuals and those who are interested and can bring on board established NGOs. These individuals then constitute themselves as a subcommittee to realize their own event, with or without the direct sponsorship of TWC. There have been about forty "members" on the mailing list. Most of them are tertiary-educated, and their ranks include non-Singaporeans active in local civil society organizations. Many came to know of TWC when browsing the Internet, and signed on because they were looking for engagement in civil society activities.

From the beginning, TWC decided to stay out of party politics, whether PAP or opposition. This is because with the massive presence of the Singapore state, the raising of political issues can be and usually is psychologically debilitating, as individuals say they feel the "hopelessness" of change. So, while the members realize that state is ultimately not avoidable, they seem to want to keep it at bay as long as possible. So far this arrangement has worked rather well. Apart from the fact that forums under the auspices of TWC have been well attended, different NGOs have, as a result, begun to work together on projects of mutual interest and benefit. The unregistered character and the organizational looseness of the network are intentional, although they sometimes make coordination difficult. Success depends above all on the goodwill of members. This was illustrated in the controversy around a forum on Civil Society proposed by one of the committee members.

Given the group's desire to stay away from party politics, this forum was particularly thorny because its public announcement on the Internet indicated that a prominent and controversial opposition political party member, Dr. Chee Soon Juan of the Singapore Democratic Party, was to

be invited as a panel speaker. This announcement came as a surprise to many TWC members, particularly some of the core members. A lengthy debate ensued. To the extent that all TWC members recognize that discussion of politics is unavoidable, the issues that emerged concerned the timing of the forum and the selection of panelists rather than the occasion as such. However, it may be too sanguine to say that such difficulties were but the growing pains of an organization that seeks to be open, transparent, and democratic.

One suggestion that has recently emerged is for the proliferation of many "TWCs," each with different foci and interests, yet loosely integrated as a civil society network. After organizing a successful "civil society fair" that brought NGOs to the attention of the public in October 1999, TWC went on the next month to organize a public forum on the state of civil society. The core group's decision to keep out of party politics prevailed. Although the forum did not attract huge numbers of citizens, it provided an occasion for in-depth discussion among civil society groups and younger volunteers. The TWC's core membership had designated the end of the forum as the time for its own "self-destruction." By the end of the conference, however, the group decided to stay together as a "virtual community"—linked via an Internet portal but potentially able to mobilize in the event of the need for concrete activities.

## The Roundtable: A Political Commentary Group

The Roundtable (RT) emerged in the mid-1990s as the first civil society group to be registered explicitly as a "political commentary" association. Its mandate is to provide non-partisan, independent criticism and comment on political issues. That the basic citizen's right to comment on how one is governed has to be registered by a Registrar of Societies tells much about the constraints that are placed on the political sphere in Singapore. Indeed, one of the RT members, a constitutional lawyer, has pointed out that the registration process is arguably unconstitutional because it infringes on constitutional rights of expression and assembly. However, no one has challenged the constitutionality in court, not least for the fact it would be financially very costly. In any event, the desire of these individuals to have a public voice in political matters had caused one of its founding members to contemplate starting a political party. The party was not meant for the purpose of contesting elections, but just to have the right to publish political opinions in a party newspaper, as one way of circumventing the Newspaper and Printing Act.

The group started out with five or six individuals, most in their mid-thirties or older and all professionally trained. The founding group included three academics, one journalist, one lawyer in private practice, and one businessman. It was multiracial in composition, indicative of the emerging "race blindness" among younger tertiary-educated Singaporeans. Since then, the Roundtable has expanded to about fifteen members. Membership is by invitation and kept small because, according to one of the members interviewed, trust among members is important because of the nature of their mission. Meetings with all members in attendance are irregular, typically called in relation to specific social issues. Otherwise communication among members is conducted through electronic channels.

The group has no specific areas of concerns but comments when it deems necessary or useful. The group has sent letters to specific cabinet ministers, requested and met with politicians, and written letters to the media. The process generally begins with some members voicing their concerns over a particular issue. If members agree on an issue's importance, someone drafts a letter and circulates it among the executive committee and, after revision, sends it on to relevant authorities. If it is a letter to the press, then two executive committee members will sign their names on the letter, in addition to the RT designation. This is because the local press has a rule of not publishing anonymous letters or those that carry a pseudonym.

The most recent issue on which the RT has commented involved its suggestion that a specific place in the city be established as a public location for free speech. The RT did this after the issue had been raised by opposition politician, Chee Soon Juan, who went to jail for violation of the public entertainment legislation by giving a public speech in the city center without a permit from the police. The suggestion for a designated free space was deemed plausible by none other than Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew.

This mode of operation shows that the RT is generally reformist in character. The aim is simply to improve the political condition consistent with the general idea that the political space should be more open. The organization's position is that whenever political spaces are given, it should be ready to take and use it, without raising the fundamental question of why space has to be given in the first place. This includes proposing one of its members to the available Nominated Members of Parliament (NMP) seat. As it happened, not one but two of its founding members served as MPs for 1997 to 1999. Consistent with this pragmatic spirit, several members are active in other civil society organizations.

The RT does not directly address the issue that it is a democratic government's duty to explain why it is usurping freedoms from citizens rather than granting such freedoms only when it sees fit. The organization's willingness to sponsor MPs and engage in "closed-door" consultations with the government all imply the risk of being seen as "co-opted" opinion makers rather than independent agents.

No doubt the reformist character of the RT reflects constraints imposed by the Registrar as conditions for registration. One of the conditions is that the RT is not permitted to hold public forums on its own, as it is registered as a members-only organization. This has prevented it from taking high-profile positions. Its members, for example, can only appear in public forum as invited speakers at conferences and forums organized by others. This regulation has also prevented the RT from expanding because the absence of high public profile leaves it relatively obscure from public view, except for those who read the *Straits Times* attentively. In the future, the RT membership hope to remove these restrictions on their organizational practice.

## Conclusion

What we have attempted in this essay is to map out some of the consequences of the social differentiation that has taken place in Singapore behind the apparently unchanging face of political dominance by the People's Action Party. The process of differentiation has occurred because the economy and stability have allowed individuals to exercise greater choices in their endeavors. It has also taken place because of the expansion of educational opportunities, including higher education, all of which have enhanced citizens' engagement with abstract personal and social issues, especially in the spheres of culture and the arts, and with personal and collective identities.

A question that arises is whether this increasingly differentiated and complex society will have any effect on the political culture and structure of Singapore's one-party dominant state. A plausible answer to the question will have to distinguish political culture at the everyday-life level and the political structure of electoral politics and state power and public administration. In terms of political culture of everyday life, with the presence of greater material and financial ability to make choices, individuals increasingly recognize and tolerate other individuals' rights to choose different ways of life for themselves. For even at its most selfish level, such a disposition toward others' choices is a means of preserving the right of oneself to choose. Greater individual and group differentiation thus promotes

liberal attitudes at the level of everyday life and a greater "spirit" of democratization in society.

However, a specific exception that requires mention is the case of the Malay-Muslim community. In this particular instance, the tightly drawn "community" boundaries, doubly marked by a sense of "Malayness" and the religious injunctions of Islam, appear to have the effect of reducing individual and subgroup differences within the Malay-Muslim community itself, or at least, to not allow the differences within to be aired outside the community. This may have much to do with the fact that the Malay community is a demographic and cultural minority in Singapore, a fact that effects greater community consciousness and a keener need to police community boundaries. This can be seen in contrast to Malaysia and Indonesia, where Islam is the religion of the majority population. In the two latter cases, Islam is undoubtedly a political force but, equally significantly, it is a highly differentiated rather than an unitary political force. In public discourse and political contest, the social, cultural, economic, and political positions taken in the name of Islam range from "modernists" to "fundamentalists," both terms being rather inarticulate glosses over a complex of differentiated positions. In Singapore, not only is Islam not an explicit religious focus around which political parties are organized, the term *the Malay community* with the Islamic faith as its chief characteristic is used in Singaporean public discourse without any reservation about the referent's presumed "unity." One of the consequences of these tightly drawn boundaries is that a general conservatism prevails among Malay-Muslims in Singapore. But the conservatism is fraught with ambivalence, torn between the desire to preserve "traditions" and the need to open the community to new bodies of knowledge and economic opportunity.

As to the effects of greater social differentiation on the democratization of the single-party dominant polity, the medium-term prospect is rather bleak. This is so because the ruling PAP is determined to perpetuate its stranglehold on political power at very high costs through the use of every conceivable legal strategy for electoral victory. Among these strategies are first, the very narrow definition of "libel" and "defamation," which restricts the scope of political debate within which every politician operates. Second is the use of ruling party advantages such as redrawing of electoral constituency boundaries, in which any constituency that shows a significant level of anti-PAP votes in a particular election is redrawn out of existence before the subsequent election. Third is the establishment of "the Group Representative Constituency" or "super-constituency" with up to six seats, in which every contesting political party has to field a team of candidates and the team that garnered the highest votes wins the con-

stituency. The immediate effect of this is to reduce other parties' ability to compete in such super-constituencies for lack of candidates. In addition, it dilutes any concentration of political sentiments by merging constituencies with very different social, cultural, and economic profiles. For example, the quintessentially working class constituency of Lee Kuan Yew has been expanded to include the very upper-middle-class constituency of Tanglin, changing any sense of continuity in electoral political geography. Finally, the PAP is willing to threaten to withhold public resources in constituencies that elect non-PAP politicians to parliament. The PAP's determination to stay in power is indubitable.

On the side of the civic groups, the legal requirement for a civic group to register with the government under the Societies Act imposes serious difficulties. First, the Registrar of Societies has the right to deny registration without providing any stated reason. Second, registration is often granted with specific limitations. Violations of limitations subject the organization to the threat of deregistration. Third, once registered, a society must restrict its activities to the interests of its stated constituency. It is not permitted to step beyond these limits, or join with groups outside its stated purview. If a society does overstep these limits, it can be called to show cause as to why it should not be deregistered. As registration is read as official positive sanction and insulation from political intervention, organizations that are already registered tend to be conservative politically so as to avoid deregistration. Consequently, there are very few, if any, civic resources or "social capital" available for political parties to draw upon for political support, other than the many available to PAP. As the ruling party, PAP is able to draw directly and extensively on quasi-government or government-sponsored community-based organizations.

In light of the PAP's determination to hold on to state power and the constraints faced by civic organizations, further democratization of the political sphere seems unlikely for the foreseeable future. On the other hand, at the everyday-life level, citizens' attitudes will be increasingly liberal toward each other's preferences, fueling greater social differentiation and increasing the social complexity, challenging the single-party polity's ability to speak for an imaginary "unified" nation through process of "simplification" encrypted in slogans such as the current Singapore 21 Vision, where the government-initiated "active citizenship" is offered as the model for the development of nationhood. Ironically, this model takes little cognizance of the actually existing social resources for civility and participation, the official barriers that prevent them from gaining further ground, and, finally, the limits of state-led social engineering in the process of nation-building.

## Notes

1. For a fuller discussion of civil society during the colonial era and early independence years, see Chua 1993.

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# 4

# Social Resources for Civility and Participation

## The Case of Yogyakarta, Indonesia

*Mohtar Mas'oed, S. Rizal Panggabean, and Muhammad Najib Azca*

This is a story of Yogyakarta, its people, and its culture. This small area on the southern edge of central Java, surrounded by the ruins of ancient Javanese civilizations and fortified by the looming presence of the mythical Mount Merapi (an active volcano directly north of the city), houses a community rich with traditions. It preserves a cultural legacy that has been bequeathed from generation to generation.

In the days gone by, Yogya children grew up in a world filled with folklore and mythology. Many residents still remember two especially well-known tales. One legend has it that prosperity would come to the community only if its people were able to connect the waters of the Progo River, on the western border of the area, and the Opak River, on the eastern end, so as to create one great flow. Another folktale concerns the great spirits occupying Mount Merapi, an active volcano located at the northern tip of the small province, and the legendary beautiful and powerful Queen of the South Sea, the spiritual consort of Javanese kings who is thought to control the Indian Ocean. It was believed that the success of the Javanese kingship depended on the ability of the ruler to be always mindful of the magical forces and try to balance them. Interpreted liberally, the moral of the story is that a prosperous and peaceful community can be achieved only if the people are ready to live with different and conflicting groups and interests, and try to serve as a "bridge" or a mediator working toward common ends.

In the early 1950s, Yogyakarta was given a special administrative status in the new Republic of Indonesia and called the Special Region of Yogyakarta. While the special status was ostensibly given as a tribute to the patriotic stand of its inhabitants during the revolutionary period, many Yogyanese would like to believe that the word *special* (*istimewa*) concerns something more than mere administrative status. They argue that the term implies a certain exceptional or even legendary status, especially with regards to the community's special place in the history of modern Indonesian politics and culture.

Consistent with this folkloric view, the popular image of Yogyakarta in Indonesia today is built around a kind of paradox. The region is perceived as a community blending quiescence with dynamism. On the one hand, Yogyakarta is seen as a community of multicultural tolerance and accommodation. Yogyanese are often portrayed as people committed to a tradition of tranquillity, calmness, and moderation. Theirs is a special place, where high Javanese culture has been earnestly guarded. On the other hand, at least since the revolutionary period, Yogyakarta also implies dynamism. It has been a home for many of the nation's politically active groups, a place where major national events have occurred, including the famous Presidential Decree of 1959;[1] it is also a place where many new cultural trends and political initiatives have originated.[2] Since the 1970s, the area has also been a breeding ground for militant student movements.

The exceptional role played by Yogyakarta during the *reformasi* movement against former president Suharto in the late 1990s also adds to the community's distinction. As is now widely known, political violence that began in late July 1996 and culminated in the months following the fall of the New Order in May 1998 shook Indonesian politics and society. For reasons that remain suspicious to this day (see the introduction to this book), awful incidents of mass killing, looting, and urban destruction took place in many parts of Indonesia. Although many cities and towns across Java were damaged by angry mobs, including the neighboring city of Surakarta (also a court center), Yogyakarta was left almost unscathed. In light of the fact that Yogyakarta was home to student movements active in the opposition to Suharto, some involving tens of thousands of supporters (Aspinall 1999), it is interesting to see that the political mobilizations did not result in destructive outbursts. Even during the mass rally against Suharto on May 20, 1998, an event that mobilized a half-million people (and just one week after Jakarta had been shaken by awful violence), not a single shop window was broken, and not a single person was injured. The daily mass rallies carried out later by dozens of political parties leading up to the June 1999 general elections brought considerable

violence and damage to many Indonesian cities, but resulted in only minor incidents in Yogyakarta.

When trying to account for this record of civic peace, many observers refer to popular explanations emphasizing the peculiarity of Yogyanese political culture, especially the existence of a dominant tradition centered on the Yogyakartan court, often seen as enabling the emergence of effective leadership in a time of crisis. This tradition goes back to the 1940s and the efforts of Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX, who introduced policy reforms intended to modernize a political system long regarded as a bastion of Javanese traditionalism. Consistent with this history, the popular belief in Yogyakarta's stability traces contemporary political culture back to the macro-sociological changes set in motion by the vigorous efforts of the young monarch fifty years ago to construct a new community based on a post-traditional identity broader than Yogyakarta—the Indonesian nation.

In this essay we attempt to discuss the political culture developed in this community. Our presentation has three sections. First, we examine briefly the history of social change in Yogyakarta. Simplifying this complex history for the purposes of presentation, we present some reflections on the connection between today's discourses and practices of pluralism and civic participation in Yogyakarta and the modernization endeavor undertaken over the past half century. The events that gave Yogyanese a chance to respond to the challenge of the age involved not only nation-making, but, at the same time, cultural cosmopolitanization and trans-nationalization. This experience enabled the community to develop a new polity and a public culture engendering a tradition of tolerance and accommodation. Our argument is that the macro-sociological processes of social and political modernization have shaped the life experiences of Yogyakarta citizens down to the most basic local level.

Second, we examine the experience of horizontal relations among different groups of Yogyanese in four social spheres: religious activities, NGOs and other civic associations, political organizations, and business. Using information gathered from interviews with ninety Yogyakarta residents from a wide range of backgrounds, in this section we describe the discourses and practices of citizenship in real life and their connection with the modernization project of which Yogyakarta was part.[3] The third part of our essay discusses the cultural direction the discourses and practices of pluralism and civic participation in these four spheres are taking today. The idea is to see whether changes in these fields are heading in a mutually reinforcing or convergent cultural direction, or, alternatively, a divergent one. Based on this discussion, we then assess the implications of these

changes for democratic participation and pluralist tolerance in Yogyakarta and Indonesia as a whole.[4]

## A Revolution from Above

As the site of the sultanate of Hamengku Buwono, Yogyakarta today shows the marked influence of the political initiatives of the last two leaders of the royal family.[5] In spite of the fact that they were not formally sovereign rulers of the country, the influence of Sultan Hamengku Buwono IX, and to a lesser degree his son, the incumbent sultan Hamengku Buwono X, cannot be ignored. Hamengku Buwono IX's position as a Javanese cultural leader, in particular, still has important ramifications in local as well as national political affairs.

Among the sultanate's many political initiatives, two deserve special attention. The first was the momentous decision by Sultan Hamengku Buwono IX in the mid-1940s to endorse the declaration of Indonesia's independence from the Dutch and to help revolutionary groups fight the Dutch effort to recolonize Indonesia. The sultan did so at a time when many other kingships in the Netherlands Indies were eager to support the returning Dutch colonial government.[6] By contrast, the sultan mobilized his subjects to support the nationalist cause. He let his royal residence to be used as an in-town guerilla sanctuary, and dispensed his personal fortunes to help finance the nationalist struggle (Atmakusumah 1982).

The second initiative that deserves attention was the critical move of his descendant and successor, Sultan Hamengku Buwono X, in the late 1990s to join the leadership of reformist movement against the authoritarian New Order regime and to help mobilize hundreds of thousands people from Yogyakarta and the surrounding area to hold peaceful demonstrations demanding national political reform. The sultan did this exactly one day before the New Order leader, retired Army General Suharto, stepped down on May 21, 1998. The story of Sultan Hamengku Buwono IX has since become a legend. To understand the cultural background to these courageous and innovative decisions, we have to go back to the Yogyakarta of late 1930s.

In those years, as he prepared to ascend the throne, the young crown prince was obsessed with the question of how to reassert a measure of control over his court. As a colonial subject of the Netherlands Indies, the principality was controlled by the Dutch colonial government, which was represented at the court in the position of *patih* (the chief administrator of the sultanate). The second highest position in the palace, the *patih* was

in fact accountable to the colonial government more than he was to the sultan. It was no wonder, then, that after returning in 1939 from his studies at Leiden University in the Netherlands, the crown prince became obsessed with taking personal control over court affairs by getting rid of the chief administrative position (Moedjanto 1994). His struggle to take control of the principality led him to initiate a series of political moves in early 1940s that amounted to a watershed moment in the history of Yogyakarta.

The moves toward reforming Yogyakarta began most seriously after August 1945. During that month, the *patih* died and the sultan appointed no successor. The Japanese occupation also came to an end in that month and an independent Republic of Indonesia was declared by the country's nationalist leaders. This provided the sultan with an opportunity to realize his plan for change and to use his personal popularity, administrative authority, and prestige for political change (Ricklefs 1981, 207). Supported by the subsidiary prince Pakualam VIII, who controlled a smaller territory adjacent to that of the sultanate, the sultan set in motion a process of social and political change that resulted in the emergence of a more open and plural polity.

Four themes can be found in the reform initiatives: nationalism, populism, democracy, and modernization. The sultan's nationalist disposition led him to support the independent Republic of Indonesia soon after its proclamation on August 17, 1945. The declaration was followed by further actions that allowed for the political and cultural integration of Yogyakarta into the new nation-state. The reforms initiated by the young monarch testified to his populist and anti-feudal ambitions. On this the historian M. C. Ricklefs writes:

> The Sultan overturned Dutch practice and gave the court elite a more restricted but more meaningful role. Rather than social atavism in the countryside they became the custodians of royal traditions within the court itself. Indonesian replaced Javanese as the language of official communication, thereby reducing the influence of the subtle hierarchical social levels of Javanese among administrators. (Ricklefs 1981, 208)

A particularly interesting feature of the reforms was the institutionalization of democracy in local government and politics. Among the first steps was the promulgation of laws in early 1946 creating local government councils and parliaments at all administrative levels, from the province down to the village (Soemardjan 1981, 79; Suwarno 1994, 207–230). Village government in Yogyakarta became probably the most enlightened in the whole of Indonesia.[7]

Among the sultan's varied reform schemes, none triggered more profound and lasting social change than the introduction of mass education as the main instrument of social modernization.[8] A key element in this program was the establishment of Gadjah Mada University in 1946.[9] Initiated in part by intellectuals who had recently moved to the city, the idea for the university was supported by the sultan. He allowed the main assembly hall of his palace to be used for classrooms and the university's administrative office. The establishment of these educational infrastructures spurred the development of Yogyakarta toward a plural and open community.

Meanwhile, another initiative taken by the sultan in late August 1945 contributed further to Yogyakarta's transition toward a more open community. With the return of Dutch colonial troops to Jakarta after the Allied victory over the Japanese, the safety of the leaders of the new republic was in jeopardy. In the face of this threat, Sultan Hamengku Buwono IX invited the central government to move to the more protected inland location of Yogyakarta (Yusra 1995, 153). When President Sukarno accepted the invitation and moved to the city with his entourage in January 1946, Yogyakarta became the provisional capital of the Republic of Indonesia. The exodus from Jakarta created an influx of migrants to Yogyakarta. Among the newcomers were many educated people involved in modern professions, including government officials, military personnel, party politicians, parliamentarians, journalists, academicians, and artists. Being a capital city, Yogyakarta attracted a broad range of people from Indonesia's many cultural and ethnic groups. This Javanese city thus became a more plural community than ever before. As a result of all of these developments, postcolonial Yogyakarta experienced a parallel nationalization and cosmopolitanization of its resident community.

## Cultural Revolution

To get a sense of the impact of this cultural revolution some illustrations are in order. The following cases depict three instances of dynamic social process driving Yogyanese society toward a more open and tolerant culture: (1) the artist community that introduced cosmopolitan culture to Yogyakarta; (2) the emergence of a dynamic university township in the city; and (3) the acculturation process that resulted from student housing arrangements.

The creative work of Yogyakarta's new artist community illustrates one of the most interesting cultural aspects of the city's growing cosmopolitanism. The studios and workshops brought into being in the

1940s were embryos for the later growth of a full-blown system of college-level schools for music, dance, performing arts, and other arts.[10] The schools not only provided a place where artists started their careers, they also became a meeting place for artists from all over Indonesia and from overseas. By introducing Yogyakartan society to other cultures and civilizations, the artistic community integrated these influences with local ones, facilitating a healthy and distinctive process of acculturation and "cosmopolitanization." Yogyakarta's schools have facilitated the emergence of, not only a new local culture, but one for the new nation-state.

Among the many local people who contributed to the acculturation project are two members of the royal family who authored a variety of innovative works, especially in the fields of batik paintings, Javanese dance, and shadow play. From the perspective of received aesthetic traditions, their works appear radical or rebellious. But their animating concern was to make Javanese arts accessible to a wider audience, especially non-Javanese. One of these artists, Wisnu Wardono, introduced a two-hour-long shadow play, using Indonesian rather than Javanese as the language of performance.[11] Another artist, Bagging Kussudihardjo, brought together elements of different cultures not only from other parts of Indonesia, but also from other Asian cultures, to create a new choreography intended to represent an identity greater than that of the Javanese alone.

Another expression of the cosmopolitanization process involved the steady expansion of transnational ties over the past fifty years. With its large and well-regarded university, Yogyakarta has developed a substantial community of expatriates who come as researchers, teachers, students, project managers, and service providers for Yogyakarta's varied universities. Among the earliest and most numerous of these groups were the academicians and administrators brought to the city by the Colombo Plan assistance project in the mid-1950s and by the Rockefeller Foundation in the period from 1970 to 1985. Many other smaller programs from Europe, the United States, and Australia have also contributed to university life. In a city where one-fourth of the population is directly or indirectly involved in university affairs, the impact of such transnational ties on local attitudes and aspirations has been substantial.

This transnationalization took another and equally profound step forward in the mid-1970s, when a number of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) established operations in Yogyakarta. Among the first to set up field offices in the community were the Foster Parent Plan and Zero-Population Growth; state-supported organizations like the Alliance Française and a Netherlands cultural foundation followed. These organizations were soon joined by the OXFAM and many others.

Since the 1970s, a growing number of student activists and graduates have pursued careers as managers in foreign-assisted NGOs or in organizations of their own creation. All of these transnational activities have contributed to a distinctive sense of plurality and cosmopolitanism in the Yogyakartan community.

Another example of processes pushing Yogyakarta toward a pluralist and tolerant culture concerns the otherwise mundane example of housing arrangements for students. Yogyakarta's excellent educational facilities attracted waves of young student "migrants" from across Indonesia.[12] Housing soon became a problem for the growing student population. To meet the demand, four types of lodging arrangements came into existence. The first was the dormitory provided by the university, *asrama universitas*. In light of the demand, the number of *asrama universitas* was inadequate. But most of the city's universities could not afford to invest in large, dormitory-building programs. The second type of residence involved facilities managed by provincial governments, especially for students from Sumatra, Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku, and Irian Jaya. These were designed to cater to the needs of students from each of these respective regions; hence they became known as "regional dormitories" (*asrama daerah*). A similar style of dormitory was erected by agencies of the central government, such as the Departments of Home Affairs and Public Works, which regularly sent their officials to study in Yogyakarta. These became known as *mess pegawai*, or "officials' residence halls."

The third type of lodging involved simple rental arrangements in which the students rent a room or a house from local landlords; these are known simply as *asrama mahasiswa*, "(private) student dorms." In this arrangement, the owner of the facility typically does not live on the premises. The fourth type of lodging arrangement, finally, is the *pondokan*. This is a not-so-business-like traditional arrangement, usually on simple premises, where students live with local residents and pay for rooms and meals. Since the students live in the same house with the landlord family, this type of arrangement encourages students to adapt to local culture and family ways.

The changing management of housing both reflected and influenced broader changes in Yogyakartan culture and society. The *pondokan* was the most popular in the city from the 1950s until 1970s. At the time the university was not able to provide adequate housing for students, and the business of house rental had not yet taken hold. In terms of social solidarity, the *pondokan* system provides more incentive for the newcomers to integrate themselves into the local community. For the locals, this arrangement also gives them an opportunity to learn more about visitors.

But this cultural exchange was not always pacific. There was a time, for example, when the relations between students and landlords reflected ethnic tensions, particularly that between Javanese landlords and non-Javanese students. A stereotype in the 1950s had it that students from islands outside Java, especially Sumatrans, were rich but irresponsible. This was a period when the price of commodity exports from Sumatra and other islands rose sharply while incomes in Java held steady or declined. Suddenly, in the mid-1950s war broke out in Sumatra and Sulawesi, pitting regional separatists against central government troops. Telecommunications, postal services, and money-transfers were interrupted. As a result, many students from these two islands received no money from home and could not pay their bills. The result was heightened conflict related to the perceived misconduct of non-Javanese students suffering from the financial problems. So bitter was the experience that for some time in the 1960s and 1970s many Yogyanese families did not want to take non-Javanese as tenants.

This unfortunate experience created additional incentives for the establishment of the second type of residence, the regional dormitory or *asrama daerah*. The idea of having specific residences for people from the same region was not favored by the nationalist-minded sultan, who thought that it prevented students from developing intimate relationships with the locals.[13] The desire to reduce living expenses, however, made the *asrama daerah* an attractive option for some regional governments. Residents of regional dormitories of this sort were implicated in several instances of interethnic violence in the 1960s and 1970s.

Since the late 1970s, however, the third residential arrangement, the privately owned student dormitory (*asrama mahasiswa*) has become predominant. Two things explain this change. First, this was a period when the entire Gadjah Mada University campus moved from the central city district (near the sultan's palace) to the northern outskirts of the city. As a newly developed area, the university township was culturally remote from the sultan's palace. It also never had a tradition of in-family residential dwelling, because previously there had been no significant student population in this remote area. The second influence on the development of private student dormitories was that the 1970s saw a rationalization of room-letting by private developers. Investors in those years were able to get support from a government financial scheme to build facilities near the new campus. Arrangements like these created a new kind of social community, comprised mainly of young people able to live independent of landlord supervision and interested in interacting across ethnic divides.

The expansion of this type of living arrangement, removed from high Javanese cultural influences and with a lively multiethnic sense, helps to explain why in the 1980s there were so few instances of ethnic conflict in Yogyakarta. Indeed, there were almost none in the university township. The young student community also served as a breeding ground for new dynamism reflected in political behavior. Most of the student activists organizing the student movements since the 1980s came from this community.

This political and residential history is the context within which the discourses and practices of citizenship have emerged in contemporary Yogyakarta. This was not a deeply traditional Javanese context, but one influenced by the modernization project of a neo-traditional leader. It was this context, too, that saw the development and dissemination of a new culture of pluralism and tolerance. To assess this development, we turn now to a discussion of aspects of pluralism in contemporary Yogyakarta life.

## Discourses and Practices of Pluralism in Four Spheres

What is the nature of the discourses and practices of pluralism and participation in Yogyakarta today? Is there a public culture and social organization conducive to participation and simultaneously tolerant of ethnoreligious diversity? What sort of institutions facilitate civility and participation? What sorts of tensions accompany the process? Based on information gathered from interviews with ninety Yogyanese, we describe the discourses and practices of citizenship and participation in four spheres of social interactions: religion, civic organization, politics, and business.

### *The Religious Field: Creating a "Common Platform" for Believers*

The tradition of reformation in Yogyakarta's religious communities, especially the Muslim community, has deep historical roots. Early in the twentieth century, a group of young scholars came home from their Islamic study in Mecca with a new, more puritan understanding of their religion, and a strong will to reform religious practices among their fellow Muslims whom they regarded as heretical, mystical, or superstitious. Their reformist activities led to the establishment of Indonesia's first mass-based organization for Islamic reformism, the Muhammadiyah. A modernist movement founded in the heartland of Islamic traditionalism, Muhammadiyah spread to all corners of Indonesia through its modern schools and

medical service program.[14] Supported today by almost 30 million members, many of whom are well-educated urbanites, the organization has been a training ground for many Indonesian leaders.

This same reformist spirit lay behind the development of new discussion groups organized by young intellectuals in Yogyakarta during the 1970s. Among the Islamic study groups, an especially notable one came together under the guidance of Mukti Ali, a professor in comparative religion at the State Institute for Islamic Studies who later in the decade became a minister of religion.[15] Consisting of students from religious (especially the Yogyakarta Institute of Islamic Studies) as well as non-religious (such as Gadjah Mada University) schools, the group studied and promoted a "liberal Islam" dedicated to interpreting Qur'anic teachings so as to make the heavenly words of God more "down to earth."[16] The discussion group also advocated rational understanding of the teachings, as opposed to doctrinaire interpretation; a historical-sociological method of interpretation, rather than a strict scripturalist literalism; and a contextual approach in searching for religious answers to today's problems. (For a Malaysian counterpart, see Zainah Anwar's essay in this book.)

The study group's approach to religion also encouraged Muslims to dialogue with people of other faiths. Sociologically and contextually, believers from different faiths often could discuss issues more openly. In this manner, Mukti Ali's discussion group sought to find "meeting points" or a "common platform" between faiths. By the mid-1970s, this approach had spread across the nation, all the more after Mukti Ali became minister of religion and one of the discussion group's members joined the same department as a director of research. Other discussion group alumni went on to establish a prominent, community-based development NGO, the LP3ES (Institute for Socioeconomic Education, Research, and Policy), while others became prominent figures in the professions, mostly in Jakarta. Harsh criticisms of the group by more conservative Muslims only made the group's ideas more popular, particularly in the newly emerging and well-educated Muslim middle class (see the introduction to this book, and Hefner 2000, 113–127). In this manner, the pluralist discourse developed by the group in the 1970s, which came to be identified as a variant of Islamic "neo-modernism," provided the background for the creative and pluralist Muslim social organizations of the 1980s and 1990s.

Several offspring of this liberalizing intellectual movement became especially prominent in the early 1990s. The LKIS (Institute for Islamic and Social Studies), a social research organization specializing in a critical rethinking of Islamic ideals, was established in 1993. The founders of LKIS are young graduates of the State Institute for Islamic Studies and come

from traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama families. Upholding a "neo-traditionalist" viewpoint similar to that of the "neo-modernists," the group recruited from the ranks of Muslim student activists who learned the skills of social analysis in the student press and publications.

Utilizing transnational networks of scholars and activists, the LKIS intellectuals developed further the discourses of neo-modernist and neo-traditionalist tolerance and a contextual approach to religious issues. They also became active in the publishing industry, using inexpensive books as a vehicle for the dissemination of their ideas. The LKIS staff started by translating and publishing the works of critical Muslim thinkers, such as Hassan Hanafi, Asghar Ali Engineer, and Mohammad Arkoun.[17] Since then, their range of publications has increased considerably to include Muslim, liberal, and postmodern writers. As a small organization that relies on its own resources, LKIS has built a good reputation as serious and resourceful group, whose members are influential in academic as well as political affairs.

To appreciate the significance of LKIS's liberalizing project, we need to take note of another offspring of the 1970s discussion group, the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals, or ICMI. Established in December 1990, in a big ceremony officially endorsed by President Suharto and chaired by the president's confidante, B. J. Habibie, ICMI was intended to symbolize a new Indonesian Islamic identity. Intellectually, it was designed to support a modern community eager to catch up with the technologically more advanced nations. Politically, it was meant to advocate a pluralist and democratic society. In practice, however, ICMI could not avoid the pressures from its more militant and conservative membership to use the organization as a vehicle to Islamize the state bureaucracy. As an approach to the role of Islam in Indonesia, LKIS articulates a tolerant and pluralist understanding of Islam grounded above all in civil society, not, as with ICMI, the state bureaucracy.

Meanwhile, Yogyakarta's Christian community has in recent years seen growing interest in liberation theology, pluralist values, and interfaith dialogue. In 1992, alumni from Yogyakarta's discussion groups (Muslim and Christian) joined forces to create an institution advocating interfaith dialogue, called Interfidei.[18] A pluralistic group that includes people from different religious backgrounds, Interfidei has served as an intermediary institution and initiated meaningful interfaith dialogue through workshops, seminars, and publications in Yogyakarta and other provinces.

As an innovative venture, Interfidei attracted support as well disheartening criticism. Some dissenting voices came from the Muslim conservatives who argued that religion could never be a matter of dialogue.

Words of the Holy Book are an article of faith that cannot be reinterpreted at will by laymen. The skeptics among the Christians criticized the Interfidei activists for too liberally implementing their liberation theology and compromising their faith. Despite these criticisms, Interfidei has spawned a variety of grassroots organizations and initiatives committed to a similar vision of inter-religious tolerance.

### *The Civic Field: Organizing for Women*

Another offspring of Yogyakarta's cosmopolitan culture and, in particular, of the neo-modernist initiatives of the 1970s, is a group of Muslim woman activists who in August 1993 established Rifka Annisa Women's Crisis Center.[19] Adopting a neo-modernist position on gender and Islam, these women dared to challenge the established tradition that put women at the behest of men. They worked to promote women's rights, not only in their own organization, but in the city's biggest Islamic women's organization, the Muhammadiyah-linked Aisyiah. In a real sense, Rifka Annisa is a meeting point for Muslim women activists from both Muhammadiyah's modernist and Nahdlatul Ulama's neo-traditionalist camps.

The first women's crisis center in Indonesia, Rifka grew rapidly. Started in a low-profile manner, it soon developed branches in Central and East Java. Although it addresses many women's issues, it has been especially active in raising awareness about violence against women. When they first began to promote their ideas, the Rifka activists relied heavily on young women involved in the Muhammadiyah Aisyiah movement, which already had a big pool of Muslim women under its leadership. Speaking to the Muslim community about sensitive gender issues required a demonstrated skill in Qur'anic interpretation. To this end, Rifka Annisa recruited graduates from the Institute of Islamic Studies with a neo-modernist perspective to help develop sound religious grounding for their efforts to improve the situation of women.

Rifka Annisa has also shown great skill in using a variety of new intellectual technologies to disseminate their ideas, including pamphlets, booklets, posters, manuals, brochures, and books. It has also participated in radio talk-shows, and readers' forums in newspapers and magazines. It has mobilized support from public as well as private regional, national, and international institutions. Due to its own lack of resources, it established close ties with several Qur'anic boarding schools (*pesantren*)[20] whose traditionalist directors (*kyai*)[21] are happy to provide shelter for women suffering from domestic violence. A team of lawyers also works with Rifka Annisa. The organization also operates a consultation office in a big

Catholic hospital and in the regional police station. Internationally, Rifka Annisa Women's Crisis Center has been connected to a network involving international foundations and aid agencies, including the Ford Foundation and Population Council, as well as women's organizations in Europe, North America, Australia, and Asia. This remarkable ability to work with a diverse variety of people and agencies has allowed Rifka Annisa not only to develop new initiatives for women, but to increase civic participation across a broad spectrum of the community, including people from varied ethnic and religious backgrounds.

### *The Political Field: Overcoming Confessional Politics*

The discourse of civility developed in the 1970s and implemented in the 1980s also provided a background for new efforts to develop a more pluralistic politics capable of mobilizing supporters from different ethnoreligious backgrounds. The story started in early 1990s, when a young leader of Muhammadiyah, Mohammad Amien Rais, broke a political taboo by proposing to discuss plans for President Suharto's succession at a time when Suharto himself had announced no such plans. The shrewd move was perceived as a slap in the face by the authoritarian president. Having been an unchallenged ruler for almost thirty years, Suharto managed to create a strong ruling class with authoritarian personality and submissive subjects. The rule to which everyone was supposed to adhere was never to challenge the president directly.

When, soon afterward, the New Order leader mobilized his supporters in the Muslim community against Amien Rais, the young Muslim leader found many new friends he never had before, including people in secular and non-Muslim groups. Almost overnight, Amien Rais, an American-trained political scientist who had often been perceived as anti-American, anti-Jewish, and anti-Christian, attracted a lot of sympathizers and supporters from many non-Muslim groups in addition to his fellow Muhammadiyah members.[22] Amien soon found himself immersed in the opposition and developed a reputation as a courageous challenger to Suharto.

These events encouraged Rais to create a political party in 1998 to mobilize popular support from many different ethnoreligious groups. Called Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN), this new group allied a mass base of Muhammadiyah Muslims with smaller groupings of Catholics, Christians, Hindus, Chinese, secular middle-class activists, and urban reformist youth groups.[23] The party was intended to devise a new approach to politics, raising issues long forbidden in New Order politics. It proposed

amendments, for example, to the heretofore "sacred" 1945 constitution, and called for a federal system of government in place of the existing current unitary system.

Many people in the political arena and some in Rais's own Muhammadiyah community, unfortunately, were not ready for such bold initiatives. Dissenting voices against the PAN endeavor were heard from several directions. From the Muslim community, conservatives argued that Muslims in PAN were merely catering to the Christian political cause. It was the Muslim community, these critics argued, who had suffered most under Suharto's authoritarianism, especially when some of his Christian generals, technocrats, and advisers in the 1970s introduced measures that effectively destroyed the Muslims' political, economic, and cultural vitality. On the other hand, there were also skeptics in the non-Muslim community who questioned the sincerity of Amien Rais's commitment to democratic pluralism.

There have also been some internal tensions among the party factions concerning the ethnoreligious issue. Feeling that they represented the biggest faction in the party, Muhammadiyah leaders tried to dominate the party agenda and recruit their followers to leadership positions in regional chapters of the party. These efforts created serious tensions among the PAN rank-and-file which, in the end, Rais was unable to overcome, resulting in the defection of young activists in several regions. This is part of the reason the party failed to live up to expectations in the June 1999 elections, when it placed fifth among the forty-eight contending parties, winning just 7.3 percent of the national vote. In the province of Yogyakarta, however, PAN won 17 percent of the vote; in the city of Yogyakarta, it achieved 19 percent.

Some observers believe that the votes were not so much for PAN as for Amien Rais. The result of an opinion poll conducted shortly before the election supported this position. Many respondents whose party preference was not PAN preferred Amien Rais as presidential candidate over their own respective party leaders. Given this personal political resource, the PAN leader has before him a lot of opportunities to expand his project of mediating different ethnoreligious groups and facilitating them to build strong common platforms. But the phenomenon of PAN reflects the dilemma political activists face trying to bridge ethnoreligious divides. The challenge of building trust is a great one. Although reservations about Amien's past maneuvers have diminished, many observers still express doubts about his entourage of Muslim advisers and the sincerity of his pluralist commitments.

### *The Economic Field: Bridging the Ethnic Gap*

In light of the stereotypes widespread in Indonesia, one of our interviewees, whom we'll call Budi, is an unusual Chinese-Indonesian by any standard. He started business in the early 1960s, while still in high school, by helping his father's family business produce whiskey and other alcoholic beverages. With the experience and the capital gained from this business, in the early 1970s he opened his own hardware store. Employing the conventional formula of "perspiration and perseverance," the business grew fast and diversified. By the 1990s, Budi found himself among the small club of large local entrepreneurs.

Until the early 1980s, Budi was an otherwise conventional Chinese-Indonesian. He had been educated in Chinese-language schools, graduating from high school in 1964.[24] His business activities relied heavily on family and filial connections. His religious beliefs were grounded in Confucian teachings. However, sometime around 1982–1983, just as his business was flourishing, Budi embarked on a different spiritual path. Out of long-held curiosity, he studied Islamic texts, converted to Islam, and made the pilgrimage to Mecca. All this happened within a year. Since then, his social activism on issues related to Islam has only increased. He joined and later became the chair of the local Chinese-Indonesian Muslim Association. He sponsored Islamic study groups. He organized several social groupings in which Chinese-Indonesians and *pribumi* (non-Chinese, "indigenous" Indonesians) met to make common cause. When Amien Rais created PAN in 1998, Budi joined the party's local branch and ran in the 1999 election as a PAN candidate for national parliament.

Meanwhile, Budi's business activities also entered a new era. He established a savings and loan cooperative to finance around two hundred micro-enterprises. Designed to serve as a bridge linking big Chinese-Indonesian entrepreneurs with small *pribumi* merchants, the project was greeted enthusiastically by fellow Muslims.[25] Unfortunately the credit program eventually collapsed, when the loans given to *pribumi* businesses became non-performing following the monetary crisis of 1997–1999. However, the cause of the collapse was not purely economic. Many of the debtors perceived the project as a charity run by a newly converted Muslim brother, not as a real business deal. The "charity" cost Budi around 300 million rupiah (U.S. $125,000).

Budi exemplifies the difficulties faced by anyone attempting to bridge the economic gap between Chinese and *pribumi* in Indonesia. Very few Chinese-Indonesians have taken the chances Budi did. Many fellow

Chinese even ridiculed Budi's decision to convert to Islam. Moreover, on the Chinese as well as the *pribumi* side, prejudices still abound.[26]

Budi's efforts to bridge the ethnic gap, however, did not occur in a social vacuum. In fact, his actions reflected circumstances to some degree peculiar to Yogyakarta and Java. Culturally, Indonesians of Chinese descent living in a Javanese cultural environment behave differently from those living in other cultural milieus, especially in places like Medan (North Sumatra) and Pontianak (West Kalimantan). The Chinese in Java tend to integrate more fully into local culture and society; most are locally born *peranakan* rather than China-born *totok* (see the introduction to this book). For many, Javanese is their mother tongue and Indonesian their second language. Very few speak Chinese.[27] In addition, the Chinese community in Java contributes enormously to culture, not only through cuisine, but in the Javanese arts and batik painting. Java batik paintings with Chinese-style have enriched the cultural life at least since early twentieth century. In this sense, the Javanese-Chinese have long been part of local Javanese society.

Viewed from this perspective, Budi's works were just another step in a process that began long before his time. But his was an unusual step nonetheless, addressing as he did the delicate issues of religion and business. He tried to mediate not only between Chinese and *pribumi*, but between big businesses and small ones. In the end, the tasks proved more difficult than he had imagined. In part, this reflected the fact that it is easier for Javanese to accept Chinese as community members if those Chinese are not merchants. Chinese outside the business sector, in fields such as teaching, research, law, and public administration, tend to be perceived as more Indonesian that those who are in the business sector. In this regard, it seems that many *pribumi* tend to view Chineseness as a class status, not a cultural one. Hence, Chinese-Indonesians who work outside business are seen as indigenized and trustworthy; but those with a predominantly "business-face" are not.

The four cases discussed above indicate the complex discourses and practices of pluralism and citizenship in four social spheres in Yogyakarta. In the first three spheres, religion, civic organization, and politics, we see a pronounced movement toward the strengthening of pluralist interaction. In the realm of business, however, the discourses and practices of pluralism and participation face an enormous and as-yet unresolved challenge.

## Conclusion

This story of Yogyakarta began with a leader's effort to modernize traditional institutions so as to facilitate the emergence of "new institutions and public frameworks for cooperation, innovation, and participation" (Hefner 1998b). The sultan laid the foundation for a tradition of civic participation that proved conducive to pluralism and heightened social participation. Twenty years later, we can see that the tradition has been "scaled up"[28] by a new generation of activists who initiated "conscious and systematic mediation" in the spheres of religion, civic organizations, politics, and business. These initiatives have in turn set in motion new discourses and practices of citizenship in other social realms.

The "scaling up" of the tradition produced varied outcomes. As described above, efforts in the realms of religion, civic organization, and politics seem to be heading toward a more uniform and consensual pattern of pluralism and citizenship participation. Using local as well as external resources, the leaders of Interfidei, Rifka Annisa, and PAN have been able to initiate conscious and systematic mediations that strengthen the culture of pluralism. The three organizations have served as models for other groups aspiring to similar ends. Some groups, especially university students and academics, have followed Interfidei's trail by organizing interfaith projects. Rifka Annisa not only branched out to other towns in Java; it evoked a positive response even in places as far away as East Kalimantan. Despite its meager share of the vote in the 1999 elections, PAN has also encouraged many Indonesians to engage in politics in a new and more pluralistic way. Large segments of the Muslim middle class, in particular, have seen the benefits of a pluralist politics.

The discourses and practices of business, meanwhile, have yet to develop in as unambiguously pluralist a way. It seems that the social resources developed since the 1940s have had a greater impact on the religious, social, and political spheres than the economic one. It is interesting in this regard to see that the modernization scheme launched in Yogyakarta in the 1940s tended to ignore business. Almost no effort was made to make the market a meeting place for people from different ethnoreligious backgrounds. Nation-building was pursued without a parallel commitment to inclusive market-making. Commerce thus remains an arena primarily reserved for Chinese. This condition no doubt reflects the legacy of Dutch colonialism with its segregation of Chinese from *pribumi*. Given a special legal status higher than the *pribumis*, the Chinese enjoyed more opportunity to develop their skills in the commercial

sector, while the *pribumis* were kept in their agricultural world. Worse yet, the Javanese maintained a tradition that looked down on commercial activities.

Given all this, what is the future of pluralism and citizenship in Yogyakarta? In the realm of religion, civic organizations, and politics, progress toward more pluralist discourses and practices of citizenship can be expected. These are the areas where the signs of pluralist culture and organizations look most promising. But new and bolder initiatives in the business sector are still badly needed. Lacking any clear historical precedent, a pluralist transformation of the business realm requires a leadership able to "scale up" the local resources so as to encourage people from different ethnoreligious background to create a common platform for participation in the marketplace as well.

## Notes

1. This decree resolved a political deadlock at the time by reviving the revolutionary 1945 constitution. This was a watershed in Indonesian politics and had an enduring impact.

2. At least since the 1980s, it seems that there has been no day without a national newspaper reporting about Yogyakarta politics. Most national media have branch offices in the town. During the turbulence of 1996–1998, many foreign media also sent reporters to Yogyakarta.

3. Working with the three-country project, our team conducted, transcribed, and analyzed the results from ninety interviews; Robert Hefner conducted an additional 120 interviews in a parallel research endeavor. Even though the two samples were distinct, we were able to compare trends in Hefner's findings with ours.

4. What follows is not simply an account based on the "great man" theory of politics or history, which emphasizes the impact of individual leaders on historical events. Rather, it is a historical account of Yogyakarta to support the contention that during the first years of independence the sultanate was one of few institutions able to undertake effective initiatives. This was largely due to the court's control of physical and non-physical infrastructures and its ability to finance the efforts from the monarch's own purse. See Atmakusumah 1982.

5. Literally the title means "The Ruler of the Earth."

6. Unlike the sultan of Yogyakarta, who was recognized as the leader of people's movement, the other principalities became victims of social revolution and lost their powers, fortunes, and privileges.

7. As part of the democratization project the Special Region of Yogyakarta in 1951 held its own general elections to elect representatives to the local house of

representatives. The election was also designed as a model experiment before the national elections of 1955.

8. The sultan was not, of course, the first to introduce mass Western education. Decades before him a group of Muslim leaders established Muhammadiyah and another group of Java-oriented intellectuals founded Taman Siswa. Both organizations managed to set up nationwide school systems. As part of its "ethical policy" in the early twentieth century, the Dutch colonial government also helped some Christian and Catholic groups establish their school systems across the Netherlands Indies.

9. This public university was a fusion of two colleges, the privately sponsored Gadjah Mada University and the government-sponsored-Academy of Political Science. Meanwhile, a group of Muslim intellectuals had previously established the Indonesian Islamic University (Moedjanto, 1994, 63; Yusra 1995, 183–184). Around the same time, the government also set up the Air Force Academy, many of whose cadets died as heroes during the war of independence.

10. These schools offer programs of three to four years and are called "academies."

11. Conventional performances last from dusk to dawn and are presented in an eloquent Javanese.

12. In the late 1990s there were some 120 college-level schools offering many different programs.

13. In the wake of serious conflict involving students of several *asrama daerah* against pedicab drivers supported by local residents in 1979, the sultan appealed to provincial governments who owned *asrama daerah* to stop subsidizing the residences. Many students were forced to move to more inclusive housing arrangements.

14. Muhammadiyah was established in Yogyakarta's Kauman district, a neighborhood close to the sultan's palace and also inhabited by his religious officials, who practiced an Islam mixed with Javanese and Islamic traditions.

15. Among the disciples were Dawam Rahardjo (a Javanese of modernist, Muhammadiyah leanings), Djohan Effendi (a Banjarese from South Kalimantan and a member of the Ahmadiyah movement), and Achmad Wahib (a Madurese from a traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama background).

16. The Indonesian word is *membumi,* literally, "to take it down to earth." The idea is to make the teachings relevant to the problems people are facing today.

17. Hanafi is a postmodernist theoretician on the Islamic Left; Ali's works represent a Muslim version of "liberation theology"; and Arkoun wrote a book on Islamic reformation.

18. The Indonesian name is Institut Dialog Antar Iman (Institute for Interfaith Dialogue).

19. Rifka Annisa means Friends of the Women.

20. Islamic boarding school.

21. Head of a *pesantren*, a traditional Qur'anic boarding school.

22. With the support of the Rockefeller Foundation's scholarship, Amien Rais

studied at the University of Chicago and earned his Ph.D. in political science in 1981.

23. The National Mandate Party.

24. As discussed in the introduction to this book, the Suharto regime closed the Chinese-medium school system to Chinese-Indonesian citizens in 1966.

25. The recipients of the credit were mostly peddlers, street vendors, hawkers, and similar micro-enterprises.

26. On this Budi told this ironic story. One day he applied for a residential ID card, for which he had to provide some personal information. When the official asked him his religious affiliation, Budi responded "Muslim." Hearing this answer, the officer responded incredulously, "Are you really?"

27. This situation could change as more Javanese-Chinese are attracted to jobs with foreign investment companies owned by Hongkong and Taiwanese businesspersons. These typically offer a higher salary for those with Chinese-language proficiency.

28. Peter Evan's term as quoted in Hefner 1998a.

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# 5

# Boundaries and Beyond

## Whither the Cultural Bases of Political Community in Malaysia?

*Sumit K. Mandal*

The cultural boundaries of political community have been clearly established for some time in the study of Malaysia. For the most part, the country has been viewed along the lines of the plural society model advanced by Furnivall in the 1940s. With some variations, independent Malaysia would appear to reflect quite nicely the colonial-era model of an ethnically divided polity. Formed shortly before independence, the ruling coalition of ethnic political parties has survived for more than forty years, thanks in part to a measure of pliancy and compromise among its elites. In international politics, Malaysia's ruling elites take pride in the power-sharing between ethnic parties as their very own formula for economic development and managing conflict in a multiethnic society. This formula is credited with the three decades of relative political stability since the watershed electoral crisis of May 1969 manifested in interethnic violence.

Following the economic liberalization measures of the late 1980s, the country's political economy has been rapidly and fundamentally transformed. The political posture of the ruling coalition has shifted in tandem. In a move unprecedented for the political leadership in the postcolonial era, Mahathir Mohamad has recently promoted the notion of a transethnic national identity. Two key terms were advanced as a result: Smart Partnership and *Bangsa Malaysia* (the "Malaysian Nation"). Initially, the former was advanced to describe the strategic cooperation between the state and private sector in business enterprises. Later the term came to refer as well to the coalition politics now credited with the stability that allowed

for the different ethnic groups to share in the financial rewards of economic globalization.

*Bangsa Malaysia* followed suit and instilled hopes for a political community devoid of ethnic distinctions. However, it soon became clear that the novel idea was to be realized only in the distant future when the country would be fully industrialized: in the year 2020. In this instance and in the use of the term *Smart Partnership,* social organization is understood to serve the country's economic, technological, and industrial growth. Both terms nicely reflect the economistic rationale underlying social organization today that is the key feature in common with the plural society model of the colonial era. On the whole, the promotion of a transethnic national identity has been given little political and institutional substantiation, while the prevailing ethnic policies and party politics persist. Nevertheless, the discourses of political community were recast in Malaysia in the 1990s.

Given the new conceptions of political culture that have followed in the footsteps of rapid economic transformation, how have social groups in Malaysia responded? Is the plural society model being displaced by new forms of more inclusive pluralism? This essay engages these questions by focusing on the arts community, a group largely neglected in the social science scholarship on Malaysia. Social actors in the arts constitute an important research focus because of their significant role as culture producers and because they represent a variety of sectors—from as far afield as the production of artwork to the management of cultural enterprises. In addition, the performing arts in particular has been identified as "non-communally based" (Kahn and Loh 1992, 14). Broadly defined, the arts community includes culture producers, administrators, businesspeople, and others whose work engages society in image, word, sound, and movement, and thereby informs cultural change. To further refine the line of inquiry, this essay pursues two more specific questions in studying social actors in the arts: What kinds of cultural solidarities are present and on the rise in Malaysia and why? What kind of mediating role if any does the arts community play in the production and rise of these solidarities?

The essay is divided into three parts. In the first, a series of in-depth interviews are engaged for the kinds of memories invoked by the respondents when questioned about interethnic communication in their working and social lives. The memories are pieced together in a narrative organized in generational terms to investigate the relationships and possibilities they offer—cultural solidarities, tensions, dialogues, and others. The second part discusses the research findings within some relevant theoretical frameworks. The essay concludes with a discussion of the cultural

and political alternatives to the plural society model offered by the arts community in Malaysia.

## Ways of Remembering

The memories elicited below are from respondents living in the capital Kuala Lumpur and its environs in the Klang Valley. A limit was imposed in this regard at least in part due to the finite resources available in conducting research. A more significant reason lies in the variety of ways in which a great deal of importance is attached to this region. The most obvious of these is the centrality of the Klang Valley as it is called to party politics, economic and technological development projects, and corporate activities at the national level. With greater implications for cultural politics, however, this expansive region of highways, malls, and residential areas is defining the built environment as well as the social landscape of the country. By erasing the small villages, working class enclaves, administrative buildings, cash crop plantations, and disused tin mines present in this region since the colonial era, the completely reconstructed space speaks to the power to rapidly transform into a newly industrializing country. On the one hand, the whole spectacle lends tangible support to the government's claim that it has successfully modernized the country in every aspect of life. On the other, developing within this densely populated, fast-changing, young, and culturally diverse urban space is a cultural politics that promises new directions.

Given the focus on the urban center, the respondents are representative of the contemporary rather than the traditional arts, although such distinctions are increasingly irrelevant in describing the variety and nature of work that is exhibited and performed in the growing arts world. Besides paying attention to the contemporary, few other limitations have been imposed. Other features of the sample were determined largely by the character of the interviewees who were eventually assembled. The twelve interviewees—three women and nine men—range from twenty-five to seventy-three years old. Eight of them describe themselves as Malay, two as mixed, one as Indian, and one as Sri Lankan. While most are Muslim, the sample includes two Hindus, a Christian, and a Buddhist. Delivered in either Malay or English, their narratives reveal a far greater mix of cultures present in their social lives. Most are writers, although a good number are equally active in the other arts. There is in addition a filmmaker, a cartoonist, a poet, and a cultural affairs manager. While most of the interviewees engage in work such as theater that is typically non-commercial

and limited to smaller audiences, some are profit-oriented and produce work of a widely popular nature.

The following discussion of the memories invoked by the respondents is divided into three historical and generational groups. Each group has been given a thematic title that represents as much as possible the respondents' voices—discordant as they may be—as well as the period that molded them. (Unless otherwise stated, pseudonyms have been used here and in all subsequent references to the respondents.) The discussion begins with "The Prewar Generation: Nationalist But Apart" with the voices of four of the oldest respondents, born between 1926 and 1940 and thus from fifty-nine to seventy-three years old. Those born shortly before and after peninsular Malaysia's independence in 1957 are discussed in the section "The Merdeka [Independence] Generation: Equally Divided?" Born between 1950 and 1961, this group is made up of five people ranging in age from thirty-eight to forty-nine. The last section, "The NEP Generation: Recognizing the Stranger?" turns to those born between 1969 and 1975. This group consists of individuals twenty-four to thirty-four years old. All of them, then, were brought up largely in the period following the inception in 1970 of the New Economic Policy, the government's milestone effort at social engineering.

### *The Prewar Generation: Nationalist But Apart*

Rokiah Sulaiman and Zainuddin Muhammad, ages sixty-two and sixty-one respectively, offer some insightful points of contrast as they locate themselves in the social landscape of Malaysia. Both individuals are ethnic Malay and have been at the forefront of writing, documenting, and popularizing Malay arts and culture. However, each has been informed by radically different perspectives. Rokiah is driven by an uncompromising preference for ethnic Malays in all aspects of her work and life while Zainuddin does not profess ethnic exclusivism. The two sharply contrasting positions are worth comparing at some depth before turning to the others included within this first group.

Born in 1937 to a Malay nationalist family in the northern state of Kedah, Rokiah Sulaiman works in a variety of fields. She is a popular writer, historian, publisher, and the owner of a bookstore in Kuala Lumpur who has retired from her job as an archivist. Her sense of cultural loss and degradation among Malays is deeply felt and always located in relation to the threat posed by "the non-Malay," especially the Chinese. Hence, she states the following with regard to the use of English, Mandarin, and other languages in the country: "The main language is ours of course . . . [we]

must speak Malay. Chinese, or any other language . . . that's theirs, why would we ever want to use their language." She identifies "us" and "them" in definitive ethnic terms for practically any issue raised. Her response when asked to comment on the increase in highway tolls is indicative of the single-minded concern with Malays only: "should it affect our people, I would be sad, it would be a pity." She focuses her creative energies as a writer, invests her money, and makes decisions at work in order to unabashedly promote Malays and exclude others.

Rokiah's ethnicist narrative conforms to an historical theme that has roots in the earliest discourses of Malay nationalism: the fear held by Malays of the loss of their homeland to outsiders (Cheah 1984, 79–80). For her, the theme is an idealized memory of struggle that she keeps alive until today. So she states: "My hope for time immemorial, is to help our people, to ensure that our people rise again. Before our people were truly great. Today, others have come to control this [and] that, we have fallen." Thus she sustains her ethnicist perspective.

Zainuddin Muhammad takes a different tack altogether. Born in 1938 in Perak, he has worked in a number of professional capacities. He is a writer, historian, expert on Malay architecture, and museum curator. Much of his life has been dedicated to the documentation and preservation of Malay architectural and historical landmarks. He displays little exclusivism when discussing himself or ethnic Malays in relation to others. His favorite point of reference is his own *kampung* (village; hometown), Lenggong in Perak, where he claims the ties between ethnic Chinese and Malays have long been intimate and cooperative.

The economic growth of the past decade has had its impact on Lenggong as well. From his frequent visits to his hometown, Zainuddin observes these noteworthy new developments: "Lenggong town is lively today. A Malay shopping complex exists already, there was none before. There's even a Malay restaurant now. . . . I've got this Malay stall where the Chinese eat also. At night, it's 90 percent Chinese who eat there." Malays, he adds, can do business nowadays. His own perspective on the social dynamics among ethnic groups is materialist. When times were hard in the past, he says that "*kampung* people would feel like killing a Chinese if they saw one [and] Chinese would feel like killing a Malay." But these feelings disappeared with improved economic conditions.

Zainuddin and Rokiah are both concerned about ethnic Malay communities and cultures, not least because their lives have been influenced by the rise of anti-colonialism and nationalism. However, the former's views on Malay identity are neither primordial nor idealist as they are in the case of the latter. Indeed, he notes with ease his Pakistani, Thai, and

Malay heritage while making observations about the creation of a singular "Malay" identity and tradition as the direct result of British colonial interventions. Between the two, both "Malay" and "nationalist" acquire very different meanings. Hence also the kinds of solidarities expressed toward other ethnic groups. While Rokiah stands by her defense of the supremacy of Malays in the country, Zainuddin sees the possibility of a future hybrid nation.

Thomas Reynolds is of Sri Lankan origins but a nationalist peer of the two Malays discussed thus far. Reynolds was educated in Singapore before leaving for university at Leeds and a career as professor in English and Commonwealth Literature at the University of Malaya. Besides his prolific academic writings, he has written novels in the English language especially on the theme of interethnic politics during the struggle for independence and after. Late in his life, he studied law and began his new career as a lawyer in 1977. For nearly two decades hence, he handled cases for the Legal Aid Center.

Writer, academic, and activist lawyer, Reynolds recalls with enthusiasm the possibilities of a multiethnic political community that the independent nation could offer. He remembers the years leading to independence: "I got excited, I liked it because it was a dream, we would be all together." Centered on this dream, his first novel dealt with the vicissitudes of cultural unity in the increasingly ethnicized politics of the times.

Reynolds represents the nationalist dreams of those educated in English-medium schools located mostly in urban centers and who collectively reflected the cultural heterogeneity of the colonized. However, it must be said that Malays were primarily rural in those days and were poorly represented in these circles. The education in these schools became a shared cultural and historical experience that resulted in the first transethnic "national" community. Pluralist notions were not uncommon here. Hence the note of celebration about the country's multiethnicity in Reynolds' voice: "we in Malaysia have. . . a lot of diversity, and we have a lot to learn by intermingling."

Reynolds and Zainuddin together reflect different pluralist strains in nationalist memories. In sharp contrast, there could not be nationalists more different in one country than Rokiah, and indeed Maznah Ahmad. The latter is a prolific novelist and short story writer who was a journalist for many years. Maznah recalls formative experiences of hatred directed at her as a Malay by ethnic Chinese as well as the "silent sabotage" of Malay business enterprises by the latter. Her highest hopes are that "other ethnic groups show more respect toward Malays as . . . lords in their own land."

Maznah's ethnicist views become clear when she states candidly that she would prefer not to see the Chinese become any less Chinese, especially in business. She notes that Chinese companies with Malay names create confusion, as "we cannot differentiate the ones that are Malay from those that are Chinese." She believes that conditions should not resemble what she sees as the greater degree of cultural integration of Chinese with indigenes in parts of Indonesia. The plural society model is best preserved in her mind. As she puts it, "I would much rather have conditions continue as they are now, the Chinese with their Chinese, the Indians with their Indians."

History, personal experiences, and memories shape the pluralist and ethnicist views of the four respondents in this section. When located within this essay's concern with political community, much indeed turns on the phrase *bangsa kita* ("our people") that Rokiah and Maznah confidently invoke. Two questions may be usefully asked at this point: How is "our people" to be understood given the cultural diversity of Malaysia? How is political community to be understood? Rokiah and Maznah would presumably ground their answer in the ethnicism they profess and Reynolds and Zainuddin in cultural pluralism. Are both equally valuable and effective in creating the social and cultural solidarity for the political community in question? The answer to this question may lie with the Merdeka or independence-era generation.

### *The Merdeka Generation: Equally Divided?*

Rehman Rashid provides a perspective from the Merdeka generation when he writes: "Malaysia had greeted Independence as a nation *equally divided* between Indigene and Immigrant, and this had made all the difference" (Rehman 1993, 14). Thus the writer suggests that neither the "native" nor the "immigrant" persecuted or alienated each other to extremes. He may be right about the relatively low degree of conflict along the native versus alien divide. However, it may be hard to justify historically the neatly defined and separate identities of the two groups he describes. Indeed, it is his generation, the Merdeka generation, who bring to the fore their doubts about the distinction between native and immigrant.

Whereas the ethnicist extremes of the prewar generation are based on idealized notions, the Merdeka generation has been forced to face the demands of increased professionalism and competition in their working lives. Notably Rokiah Sulaiman's and Maznah Ahmad's ethnicist views seem little based on the running of a business proper or significant relations with Chinese businesspeople. Many members of the Merdeka

generation, however, were among the first Malays—beyond the elites—to move to urban areas, to complete a tertiary education, to undergo advanced training in special fields abroad, and to assume professional careers. They were young adults at the height of the New Economic Policy (NEP) and experienced professionals by the time the economic liberalization measures were initiated. They came in much closer and productive professional contact with other communities.

The challenges of the 1970s are summarized nicely by the writer Ghafar bin Musa as he notes just how traumatic it was to move from his kampung in the state of Perak to Kuala Lumpur. This move was by far the most formative experience of his life. It was "culture shock," he notes, to face the "different, aggressive, and unfriendly" world of the capital. He began his career with a popular Malay-language magazine by writing about what he describes as a profoundly debilitating inferiority complex. From the notable response of his readers, he came to understand that this was a common "Malay problem."

Ghafar heads an association of some two hundred writers in Kuala Lumpur, where he advocates greater pluralism. There are only Malay members at present. Ghafar believes the problem lies not in the association, whose constitution has no restrictive clauses based on ethnicity, but in the manner it "has been branded as Malay." Beyond the association's function as a platform for the training and advancement of writers, he sees a role for it in making more widely available their works—possibly on ethnic and national problems. He believes that "writing has a very big role to play in changing the perceptions of society." His pluralist views appear to have been shaped by his experience growing up in a village where "the connection between Malays and Chinese was like siblings." Each assisted the other in times of need.

Like Ghafar, Haji Hisham bin Ali offers an insight into the 1970s, reflecting as he does as an ethnic Malay who was raised in a *kampung* in the state of Johor and educated entirely in Malay. The cartoonist, novelist, and publisher observes of Malays in the years after independence in 1957 that "they had become two ethnic groups so to speak." Malays were divided between the elites educated in the English language who were socialized after the fashion of the colonizer, and the rural population whose primary language was Malay. Haji Hisham believes the 1970s to be noteworthy for the advances made by the latter in the face of the many professional and social privileges that had long been monopolized by the former. At the same time, Malay perceptions of other ethnic groups began to change as a consequence of the compromises that were made following the interethnic violence of May 1969. If in the past, the Chinese and

other communities were regarded as immigrants even though they were citizens of the country, in the 1970s ethnic Malays came to accept that "there were other peoples [*bangsa*] in this Malaysia besides Malays." Only then were Chinese, Indian, and other cultural influences considered more inclusively as "in fact Malaysian culture."

Besides shifts in conceptions of ethnicity and nationhood, Haji Hisham suggests another compelling historical trend of the period, the push by the state for the education of Malays in the sciences and professions. Reflecting on his school days, he remembers that his peers were aiming for fields that were regarded with great importance: medicine, law, engineering, and others. It was a challenge under the circumstances for Haji Hisham to develop his skills and career as a cartoonist. He relates that he once made a promise to his schoolmates who mocked him for his interests that he would "someday live by drawing alone." At forty-five he has made good of his promise but believes the arts are yet to be valued in Malaysian society as they are in other countries.

Ismail bin Abdul Rahim first established himself as an engineer and businessman before indulging in his passion, script writing, the financial returns of which have allowed him to escape the predicament of "struggling artists" like Haji Hisham. When asked of his ethnic background, Ismail replies in a mixture of Malay and English: "Malay." As if it were insufficient, he quickly makes the following qualifications: "some Siamese blood," "Penang Malay," and "father Pakistani." Besides the measure of cultural complexity he thereby renders, he notes that his father's spoken Malay "was not quite correct." He suggests that today "there were no Malays who could genuinely be called Malay," thus providing a perspective on ethnicity that is not essentialized but subject to change.

In his mid-forties, Ismail is one of many Malays who in a single generation have transformed their economic and social position by leaps and bounds. Ismail grew up in the small town of Raub, Pahang, in a poor family. As a child in the 1960s, a trip to Kuala Lumpur was a grand affair: "KL was a big city that was amazing when it really was not much to speak of, not like the KL of today." Equipped with an English-language education and advanced training, he now heads his own engineering company at the same time as he writes and produces television dramas. On all the different fronts in which he is involved, he sees a strong need to challenge Malays to be more competitive. As he put it, "Malay thinking needs to be challenged by positive elements found in other ethic groups." In this regard, he has also pragmatic matters in mind such as the actual transfer of knowledge in business management.

Equipped with a conception of ethnicity that is dynamic, he is sensitive to the new tastes developing among middle-class and urban Malays much to his professional advantage. He realizes as few others do that Malay "intellectuals, corporate people, urbanites . . . appear to be distancing themselves from Malay drama," because much of the existing fare "insults the intelligence of the viewers." His goal is to revive the popularity of Malay television dramas by producing work that is high-quality, intellectually stimulating, and innovative. A number of his successful productions, he observes, attract audiences that are not Malay alone but multiethnic. He believes that he is able to draw an ethnically diverse audience because the high quality of the production and content of his work has universal appeal.

Whereas Ismail aims to produce television dramas attuned to the changing tastes of the urban middle classes, Mokhtar bin Haji Muhammad has been probing the social world of his *kampung* past by making feature films. The two are the same age and share the same passion for their work, but the similarities end there. Although Mokhtar's films have been showcased internationally, they have hardly a following within Malaysia and as a result are not commercial successes. Following an education that took him to Tennessee and New York, he returned to Malaysia to make films. He says that he was driven to pursue this art form because of his love for storytelling.

The filmmaker provides some illuminating insights into the relationship between the film industry and Malaysia's multiethnic society. He reveals the value he places on the Malay language as a basis of multiethnic solidarity with the following passing reference: "My socializing is truly limited and that too only in film-related spheres. The Chinese and Indians in this sphere are very fluent in speaking Malay. . . . in my working world, the other ethnic groups I encounter are closer to understanding . . . Malaysia." He recognizes the multiethnic influences in the history of the small Malay-language film industry, noting that Chinese and Indian names may be found alongside Malay names in the credits for old films. Film directors from India's much larger industry helped to pioneer the making of Malay films. He observes that today Chinese directors direct Malay dramas, giving the work a slightly different orientation. He is supportive of these efforts, because the single most important matter for him is the director's sensitivity to the dynamic of the story—not his or her ethnicity.

As an artist, Mokhtar believes he has to delve into his own experience and knowledge to develop his creative work. He does not feel the need to produce films specifically for a multiethnic audience and explains his focus

as a filmmaker in these words: "[A]s I am Malay, and raised in a *kampung*, I feel I should engage the question of the *kampung* first. That comes first, and the issues in a piece of work must have a universal character. . . . So, I believe that if my work is good, other ethnic groups can feel it . . . relate to my works."

With the *kampung* in mind, Mokhtar has not necessarily been investigating issues surrounding Malay identity in the rural setting. He observes of himself: "I am a Malay but that is not much more than a category." His primary purpose is to make a good film. At present he is investigating the theme of alienation. As such he is interested in stories "about people who are alienated, those who have been placed in difficult contexts, marginalized."

As a consequence of the New Economic Policy's affirmative action, Malays are often stereotypically viewed by other Malaysians as having advanced professionally and economically thanks to the guiding hand of the state. However, the stories of the respondents suggest otherwise. As one cultural affairs manager, Catherine Rossi, put it, the alleged easy time enjoyed by some may have more to do with "connections" than "ethnicity." Artists like Mokhtar face formidable odds because he has neither the connections nor the capacity to lend his talents to the cultivation of political patronage. As such, producing films in Malaysia is an arduous task according to the filmmaker. The infrastructure alone simply does not exist. The talent and skills of crews are weak while state support for such creative work is misdirected. His Malay ethnic background is not of much help in advancing his art.

The Merdeka generation often reflects nostalgically on a past where they remember interactions between groups that were less forced and more intimate. Rossi reflects on her childhood when she feels things were quite different: "my general perception was that there were no differences and we never found ourselves in a situation where ethnically we were challenged." She follows with observations on the kinds of ethnic as well as religious differences experienced in her own young adulthood as the NEP was implemented. Rossi's memories of a rosy interethnic past are not uncommon and need clarification. She and others of like mind forget in their nostalgia that much of the pluralist interactions they recall were confined to urban middle- and upper-class communities who were English-speaking. Malays and the rural poor were nearly invisible in these spheres.

Rossi's awareness of a less culturally differentiated past in public life is also a constant reminder of how things may be otherwise. Her disappointment with how ethnic groups have ended the search for "commonalities" makes her passionate about her career "because the arts provide

an avenue to voice difference without being destructive." However, is she right that the search for commonalities has ended? Or, is it possible that it has taken a new form? Given social and political realities of quite another order, the NEP generation may provide some answers.

### *The NEP Generation: Recognizing the Stranger?*

The third and final group knows nothing else but entrenched ethnic divisions as a result of the ethnicized politics of the 1970s and 1980s. Hence, the NEP generation has both the historical distance and the capacity to begin a new exploration that seems underway in the work and lives of the three respondents.

The NEP generation seldom speaks with nostalgia about a rosy multiethnic past because its members know only the ethnicized politics, culture, and interactions of the age in which they were molded. Born in 1972, Uthaya Sankar begins with the assumption that the Malay readers of his Malay-language fiction do not understand his Indian Malaysian cultural background. The writer asserts that his work is poised to question the general ignorance among Malays of things not Malay as well as the cultural and religious self-importance that many seem to have assumed. While there was an expressed need in the past for Indians and Chinese to learn about Malay culture and Islam, there was no reciprocal effort. Today the time has come to ask, "Does a Muslim understand my religion? Does a Malay understand my culture?" These are some of the questions he broaches through his writings with the aim that Malays "have to understand [my] religion as well."

He explores without hesitation cultural issues and themes that are Indian—and in the present context Hindu—as this is the microcosm of society he knows intimately. However, he does not restrict himself to Indian themes. Indeed, he won a literary prize in a writing contest on an Islamic theme. While his readership crosses ethnic boundaries, Uthaya observes that "Indian students especially, when they read my book . . . feel very proud because they are reading about Indian culture in stories."

Raised in a working class family where ethnic barriers were unknown, Uthaya advances pluralist views through his stories in the belief that friends can "become brothers" even if their religious and ethnic backgrounds differ. He believes that it is not "race" but "mentality" that matters in social interactions. His role is not to teach people, but to tell a good story based on his convictions. Indeed he was driven to write his own stories in the first place because of his strong dislike for the available fare, which he describes as "very, very stupid stories." In this regard, he says

the following in Malaysian English about communalism in the country: "I never go and tell them 'unite.' No. But when they read my stories, the Malays can understand Indian culture and when Indians read my stories they can understand Malay culture better. The same thing is with Chinese and at least they can think and decide what to do next. So, I don't have to teach them."

More than a few of his stories touch on the subject of communalism. Sometimes they are deliberate attempts to go beyond the acceptable social boundaries. He suggests as an example his short story "*Aku dan Anak Itu* [The Boy and I]" about a Malay character who does not perform the obligatory Islamic prayers and is persuaded to do so by a young Indian Hindu boy.

"Writers raise questions," Uthaya often repeats. In this connection, he has much in common with the writer, columnist, and performer Amir Muhammad. Born in 1972 and officially categorized as Malay, Amir comes from a middle-class Sri Lankan and Malay background. Through his writing in English, Amir believes he is communicating "the importance of independent thought and freedom of speech" against the grain of the "mainstream media, which is very closed and very restrictive." He says he desires to "challenge and provoke certain things." Much like Uthaya in this regard, he sees writing as part of a process and not a means in itself. It is a continuing effort at eliciting responses and creating dialogues. Writing he believes is "very important" in some kinds of "cultural dialogues." He cites as an example the reports in the Malay press of stories in Mandarin-language newspapers. Creating such platforms for interethnic perspectives is important because they combat the tendency to view ethnic groupings as homogenous. The cultural heterogeneity embodied in the newspapers in various languages is invaluable. He highlights the simple existence of a "mix of different names from different races and . . . that each of these names represents so much, such a mix."

The popular columnist who is active as well in the Internet media observes that both pluralism and polarization are at work in contemporary Malaysia. Young people tend to mix, but it is because they belong to "the same class instead of race." He feels that the Malay language has been socialized enough that there is no longer the sense among the young that it belongs only to ethnic Malays. However, in other instances "the polarization is quite extreme." He thinks that the most ethnicist views are typically within cultural institutions such as literary associations where there is "still talk about *Melayu* [Malay] or '*bukan Melayu* [non-Malay].'" He believes that there is a struggle underway between the pluralist tendencies in society and the institutions that have been ethnicized. It is becoming

apparent that those who say "they fight for Malay rights may not be fighting for every Malay's rights but certain Malays." The same is true for the other ethnic groups.

Today many realize that there is an opportunity to break away from these ethnic categories, Amir suggests. The methods used by political parties in the past to rally people along ethnic lines do not work as well anymore. Hinting at the pluralist trends during the political crisis precipitated by the firing of Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim in 1998, he observes that ethnic behavior is no longer predictable and "Malaysians still have the capacity to be surprised by ourselves."

Amir would not disagree with the other respondents about the existence of a gap between ethnic groups as far as religion, party affiliation, and regions go. However, he offers a different perspective on the matter. He believes that the "gap may not be as definite as people think" and outside particular institutional frameworks ethnic differences do not seem to matter as much. As a consequence, he responds positively to the introduction of the idea of *Bangsa Malaysia* ("Malaysian people") in public discourse. Given the proposed reconceptualization of the nation, he sees the task of creating a society where "people can be different but still be equal" as a "great challenge."

Born in 1969 to a Sri Lankan mother and a Chinese father from the culturally hybrid *Baba* community (Malaya-oriented and Malay-speaking Chinese; see the introduction to the present book), the artist Phillip Lim is far less optimistic. Drawing inspiration from the cultural diversity of his own background, the poet, writer, and journalist crosses boundaries with ease. He has developed a strong interest in Malay arts, language, and culture. However, more often than not he is regarded with some suspicion by the institutional guardians of Malay culture. Furthermore, the banning of the key performing arts in Kelantan has led to a deep-seated concern in him for the future. The Islamic state government disapproves of the Hindu-Buddhist elements in the *mak yong* ritual performance and the *wayang kulit* shadow theater. Lim nevertheless regards these art forms not only as dynamic elements in the cultural history of ethnic Malays, but in the nation as a whole. As such he runs a non-profit company to foster and document the traditional arts in Kelantan.

The location of Kelantanese performance traditions within the cultural history of the nation is a challenge to the ethnically compartmentalized official perspective. It is a privilege peculiar, Lim observes, to "cultural bastards" like himself. Given a personal history of mixed heritage and perhaps also his middle-class background, the established boundaries imposed along ethnic lines mean little to him. He is not in a position to

favor any particular ethnic group over the other. Thus his understanding of Malaysia has been grounded in an all-embracing perspective. "Everything that exists here belongs to you," he says. "The stories of the rubber tappers . . . the stories of tin miners . . . the stories of paddy planters . . . they are also yours. Traditional theater in Kelantan is also part of your heritage. It is the larger forming of our national consciousness."

Resting the nation on elemental and diverse cultural and social influences, Lim is impatient with the popular emphasis on what he believes to be superficial expressions of Malaysian identity such as the variety of culinary traditions. Often, the arts regarded as "multicultural," he notes, do not go beyond showcasing performances of different ethnic traditions on the same stage.

Lim holds in high regard artists such as the ethnic Malay dancer Ramli Ibrahim, who is accomplished in traditional Indian styles. The dancer's hybrid artistic sensibility embodies the intertwined cultural strands in the country's history. For Lim this history renders possible not only a Malaysian "national consciousness" but an unprecedented model of pluralism. People in this region have interacted without the presence of a particularly hegemonic overarching culture for centuries, he observes. In contrast, although the United States is culturally diverse, the different groups are subject to the "overriding presence" of a dominant culture.

Despite his excitement about the possibilities offered by Malaysia's cultural politics, Lim is not naive about the resistance to change found among institutions and groups that are heavily invested in the maintenance of ethnic boundaries. While he believes the discourses of "pluralism," "civil society," and "universal values" have had their day in the political landscape, "pure political practices" are still driven by ethnicity. He is pessimistic about pluralistic tendencies because he believes that growth in this regard has taken place largely in the middle classes and not so much elsewhere. In contrast, anti-pluralist tendencies are alive and strong, as he observes of the Islamic PAS party: "I think they are the most antidemocratic and racist entities that exist now." While this group as well as the ruling ethnic Malay party (UMNO) espouse pluralistic tendencies in their respective political platforms, he sees the contrary in their campaigns, where the language used, he believes, is "racist." He thinks it is an act of self-deception to believe that "things are better because no one is talking about ethnic tensions."

A feature that unites all three members of the NEP generation is the penchant for questioning received wisdom. Uthaya, Amir, and Lim provide critiques of the politics of ethnic insularity, chauvinism, and opportunism that they believe are prevalent in Malaysian culture and society but

particularly entrenched within institutional structures. The three young men embody a distinctive cultural politics whose direction and growth have been less overtly determined by state policy than previous generations. They articulate their respective pluralist views with clarity, confidence, and purpose. These views in turn strongly inform their work as artists. As a result of the cultural work they do, political community may be reformulated in a manner unprecedented in the country's history. That the narratives of this generation should conclude on Lim's pessimism nevertheless warns against drawing simplistic conclusions with regard to the shape and influence of this alternative cultural politics.

Political community is the key question in the cultural politics of Malaysia and it is terrain that is still being contested. This is the one thematic conclusion that may be surmised from the three preceding generational narratives. In the prewar generation the ethnicist versus pluralist views of political community are advanced, each expressed in somewhat idealized or anecdotal fashion. If not eliminated, ethnicist views begin to give way to a pragmatism in work and cultural life in the Merdeka generation. A functionally pluralist view shapes this group's sense of political community and may be characterized by the dictum "we are different but we will work together cooperatively." The NEP generation reconsiders political community anew by providing a critique of ethnicism grounded in the real possibilities offered by pluralism in cultural life. They actively create new spaces and sources of cultural solidarity by producing artwork that crosses ethnic boundaries.

Contestations over political community in this instance may be rendered as contestations over the constituency and shape of the nation. Hence each generation—whose complex narratives are hardly captured in the above recapitulation—actively conceives of the nation with their own cultural and political parameters. In each instance the constitution of the nation and its cultural products are contested and redefined. Nationalism is synonymous with ethnicism in two of the ethnic Malay narratives of the prewar generation. Their views are representative of the first generations of politically conservative Malay nationalists. This strain of nationalism was catalyzed by the chauvinistic views that developed in the 1920s as Chinese and Indian communities expanded with the colonial economy. Hence tensions between nationalism and ethnicism continue to color present-day contestations.

Ethnicism no longer means the same thing in the Merdeka generation. Ethnicist nationalism remains with modifications—new issues emerge such as the politics of the national language. Ethnic fragmenta-

tion rose in the 1970s and 1980s due to the preferential policies of the NEP. However, at the same time productive relationships developed among different classes of Malays—mainly from the rural areas—and other ethnic groups. Ethnicism competed with new cultural solidarities formed as a result and also through the gradual expansion of Malay in the education system. The possibilities were thus laid down for another nationalism that in fact is inclusive.

Ethnicism can no longer be considered a dominant feature in the NEP generation because much of its basis in social reality—the relative economic "backwardness" of Malays versus others, for instance—no longer exists. Furthermore, there is a declining interest in things exclusively Malay among the growing Malay middle classes in urban areas. As a result, Rokiah Sulaiman herself admits that her children do not share her interests in the Malay language, culture, and traditions. Fluency in Malay across ethnic groups alone opens up unprecedented possibilities for this generation. In the past, cultural production in the national language was restricted to ethnic Malays. Today, young people like Uthaya are reshaping the literary and cultural landscape. His generation is rendering the nation in new terms by grounding itself in the idea that "people can be different but still be equal," to repeat an observation made by Amir.

Before turning to the analysis and theoretical discussion of the narratives, it is helpful to return to the pessimism raised by Lim. As the NEP generation is taking political community in a radically different direction, it would seem easy to give it greater credence than it deserves. Will the efforts of Uthaya, Amir, and Lim have any long-term consequence? The pessimism in Lim's account holds at least part of the answer. Besides his lack of faith in the pluralistic trends in public life that developed following the political crisis of 1998, Lim does not necessarily feel that many efforts at recasting Malaysian identity through the arts are serious or worthwhile. With regard to theater, for instance, he believes there are real difficulties in producing meaningful work. "What is Malaysian theater to speak of? I think it's very much in the process of creation and that has a positive and a negative side to it. The positive side is that it means . . . people can keep on trying and trying and it's still an open arena. The negative side to it is you don't have the point of reference. Many young people who are involved in the theater, for example . . . they don't have the sense of tradition."

To take the cue from Lim's reference to theater, political community in Malaysia is an open arena. While it is unclear whether the NEP generation will succeed in its efforts, it is nevertheless significant that it has embarked on trying to remake this arena.

## Analysis and Theoretical Discussion

In this essay I have suggested that cultural solidarities in Malaysia need not fit neatly into the old plural society model. While the colonial-era model has been instructive as a general theory, its principal weakness is its static character and inability to accommodate change. Furthermore, the model underestimates the significance and complexity of a range of historical and contemporary cultural possibilities such as mixed ethnicity simply because of the structural preeminence given to homogeneous groups (as well as to larger numbers). A whole range of cultural phenomena become marginalized if not obscured as a result (on this, see also the introduction to this book).

The essay's focus on social actors in the arts community is informed by the dynamic conceptualization of the national self being discussed by some in this field rather than the old plural society model. Instead of expecting cultural solidarities to keep in line with the ethnically divided party politics, a number of new possibilities are being discussed—from the strictly plural (in the sense of a divided society), to the pluralist (fluid intermingling across boundaries), to the fused and hybrid. The constitution of individual and collective identity is seen in terms of the kinds of memories at play. Memory in this regard is not a relic of the past but an active determinant of present thinking and action. Jonathan Boyarin provides the following helpful formulation. "What we are faced with—what we are living—is the constitution of both group 'membership' and individual 'identity' out of a dynamically chosen selection of memories, and the constant reshaping, reinvention, and reinforcement of those memories as members contest and create the boundaries and links among themselves" (Boyarin 1994, 26).

With this dynamic conceptualization, it is conceivable that a range of contrasting views exist at the same time within the same ethnocultural groups. As such, the cultural bases for political community may be far more complex and fluid than the ethnically compartmentalized pluralism embodied in the ruling-party coalition. Where do the cultural boundaries lie, what do they resemble, and what lies within and beyond them?

Cultural and social identity has been rendered more effectively through the study of the historical construction of the colonial and postcolonial self. Sheila Nair, for instance, locates the ethnicization of the postcolonial era in the denial within the nationalist discourse of Malaysians' collective historical experience. She rests her argument on the idea that postcolonial political identities "reflect the profoundly ambiguous and contradictory tendencies in nationalist discourses" (Nair

1999, 56). This approach allows her to assert that nationalism failed to reconcile the ethnic differences within the colonized that was as much a part of the colonial project as the construction of white racial superiority. Given the ongoing contradictions in discourses of the nation, her analysis suggests the possibilities of new cultural and social formations beyond the plural society model. In tandem with its deployment in the service of state economic policy and politics, the discourse of *Bangsa Malaysia*, the Malaysian people, may be seen as an acknowledgment "of changes in interethnic relations in the wake of economic restructuring and overall demographic shifts in Malaysia." Furthermore, the growing historical embeddedness of the diverse ethnic groups and "an increasingly urbanized and upwardly mobile Malay middle class have shattered some of the barriers to the development of a common nationalist consciousness as people intermingle freely in the marketplace and workforce" (Nair 1999, 75).

Nair's analysis lends itself nicely to an elucidation of this essay's focus on social actors in the contemporary arts community in Malaysia. The contradictions in social and cultural life in the colonial era were mirrored in contradictions in the nationalist discourses. The latter is rendered in the plural to accommodate such contrasting nationalisms espoused by pluralists Zainuddin Muhammad and Thomas Reynolds as opposed to the ethnicists Rokiah and Maznah. We see in this, not only signs of the old plural society model from the colonial past, but new hybrid and pluralized sociocultural formations as well. This essay thus suggests that hybrid and cross-boundary cultural solidarities are as significant today as they were in the past, although in different ways. In this regard, Tan Sooi Beng's work on the *bangsawan* theater tradition illuminates the ongoing relevance of cultural hybridity. She has shown how an urban culture of colonized peoples—their cultural space and multiethnicity itself a product of colonialism—produced in the *bangsawan* a creative confrontation with modernity. In sharp contrast to the plural society model, she notes that at the turn of the century, "The new non-European theater was open to people of all ethnic backgrounds, including the European" (Tan 1997, 192).

Following the decline of this modern hybrid cultural form in the 1940s and 1950s, its state-sponsored revival in the 1970s took on a far more Malayized character in keeping with the ethnicized politics of the times. While Malayization stimulated the growth of ethnically based cultural identity, it did not put an end to the development of hybrid cultural forms in music, dance, and drama. Malaysian art developed even if relegated to the margins by state bodies. Tan asserts that "the arena for creative musical and

cultural interaction has shifted away from bangsawan to other forms of art" (Tan 1997, 194). As Tan suggests, hybridity and cross-boundary interactions mark contemporary cultural expression. Nevertheless, the ethnicization of cultural life has left an imprint on the country.

The effect of ethnicization has been to create a divide along the linguistic and cultural spheres of *Bahasa Malaysia* (Malay language) versus English speakers, each bound up with its own notions of ethnic identity (Mandal 1998, 72–73). Despite the efforts of the government to make Malay the national language, ethnicized cultural politics has led to the association of this language with the body of the Malay rather than the nation. In this regard, Amir Muhammad observes: "if the Malay language is allowed to grow and to be free of association with the Malay race, it has the potential to be very dynamic and vibrant." At the same time, however, a transethnic Malaysian identity has been expressed increasingly in English. The state's economic liberalization measures of the 1990s have led to the expanded use of the English language over Malay in the private sector as well as in public life. As a result, English has become prominent in public spaces but, more important, it has become preeminent as the language of all Malaysians as its ownership cannot be claimed by any one ethnic group (Mandal 1998, 80).

Today creative work speaking to a range of cultural experiences and possibilities is being produced in both Malay and English, to consider only the languages of national significance for practical and symbolic reasons. Unsurprisingly, some of the boldest and most innovative of these explorations have uncovered new perspectives on Malaysian society through the exploration of language. The Second Directors Workshop sponsored by Actors' Studio and Five Arts Center in Kuala Lumpur started the year 2000 with instructive examples of what lies ahead, at least in theater. Young directors developed their skills to the point of executing a public performance under the mentorship of veteran directors such as Joe Hasham and Krishen Jit—whose own work includes articulations of Malaysia's hybrid realities (see *Work Malaysian Style* [1996], *Chance Encounters* [1999], and others).

Amir was one of the young directors who had opportunity to direct his own script, *The Malaysian Decameron*. In this adaptation of Boccaccio, Amir advanced a sharply different perspective on cultural and social life in Malaysia, where language was privileged over ethnicity. While the actors were multiethnic, none played roles that were defined by particular ethnic identities. To further remove the measure of ethnicity, each player was named by a color: Mr. Orange, Ms. Red, Ms. Purple, and Mr. Pink. All the nuances and differences in the cultural realms from which

each character emerged were conveyed by accents and languages: Malay and English. The intermingling of languages on stage has been nicely established in Malaysian theater, usually with an admitted link to the character's ethnic identity. Amir took a radically different perspective by completely eliminating any association with ethnicity.

Besides its value as an interesting innovation in Amir's directorial debut, it may be argued that it is largely through language that social life is negotiated in Malaysia. Languages, principally Malay and English, have continuously extended beyond ethnic communities. Most recent in mediating the pluralist tradition is the Mandarin language. Some 40,000 students of the 1,200 Mandarin-medium primary schools in the country are largely Malay ("High Praise for Chinese Schools" 1999). A school system that until recently has been seen as an ethnic Chinese preserve is now considered a viable alternative by others because the standard of education provided is considered to be of high quality. Both changing social realities and politics appear to be confounding the aspirations of monoethnic cultural ideologues as language—to identify but one important element—is mediating multiethnic and transethnic cultural solidarities.

## Conclusion

This essay is a contribution to ongoing efforts at recasting postcolonial society by questioning the ostensible coherence of the old plural society model and its neatly defined constituent "races." It is indeed arguable that such categorization in the study of Malaysia is justifiable on the grounds of the party politics so well established along ethnic lines. Undoubtedly, the major component parties of the ruling National Front do represent ethnic constituencies and these play a key role in the machinery of electoral politics. However, too rigid an adherence to the racial coherence of these parties renders invisible the numerous contradictions within them. A variety of cultural and political influences constitute each of the ruling ethnic parties, and it is through a sustained mobilization of organizational resources, as well as the careful tending of interethnic tensions, that each retains its internal coherence. These contradictions have long been historically present. However, at the turn of the millennium they have entered public discourse in an unprecedented manner after more than a decade of social, economic, and environmental reconstruction. For instance, the public debates regarding the saliency of ethnic categorization in the late 1990s is radical within the context of Malaysia's history. These debates engage a deeply embedded history of colonial and postcolonial

ethnicization of society and may help negotiate a radically different path in the future.

It is in negotiating a new path that the arts community plays a significant role. The visual and performing arts in Malaysia have conducted lively experiments at representing history and society in a manner radically divergent from official voices. The political crisis of 1998 led to new reverberations within the arts community. In September of that year more than fifty members of the community met in Kuala Lumpur to begin defining itself, its role, and its responsibilities within society. This meeting led to the establishment of Artis Pro Activ (APA), whose mission is expressed as follows: "We believe that it is time for the arts community of Malaysia to come together again to take a more concerted, pro-active role in developing a more open society for our country, without fear or favor." The group held a month-long multimedia arts festival at the end of 1998 and has established a platform for communication on the Internet (http://www.egroups.com/group/artisproactiv/).

This essay has argued that the pluralist perspectives developing in the arts render it possible to envision the nation as a political community. Groups such as APA, individual artists, and the arts community as a whole play an important mediating role in nation-making. Where nation-building may be regarded as the self-conscious efforts by a state to discipline society after its own image, nation-making may be seen largely in terms of the efforts by social or civil society actors to create political community.

A conception of political community with a broad sense of cultural solidarity in Malaysia necessitates crossing boundaries. Otherwise what is left takes the shape of fragmented regional and social landscapes defined along culturally exclusive lines, as presumably the ethnicists have in mind. Phillip Lim occasions a way to better understand the kind of cross-boundary movement meant here. As hybridic "bastards" like him know no boundaries, he is able to embrace the entire complex of cultural production in the nation. He suggests by this self-reference that political community and nation-making rest on a pluralism that requires cross-boundary positioning. Like him, some members of the urban middle class have succeeded at realizing this kind of repositioning. They are developing a transethnic and transregional "national perspective" that is inclusive. As a result they are able to empathize with the beleaguered artists in the traditional Malay arts of Kelantan. Put more generally, they are able to empathize with the "cultural other" in the Malaysian context.

Should the challenges seem insurmountable in contesting received notions of ethnicity—witness the continuing use of the term *stock* in every-

day Malaysian English—it is worth remembering that ethnicization is not just as old as the NEP alone but, as has been noted in several other chapters in this book, has roots in British colonial rule. Efforts at negotiating political community beyond the boundaries of the "Malay," "Chinese," or other ethnic spheres thus are radical postcolonial efforts at engaging this country's history, social structure, and culture in a comprehensive manner. What the arts proposes is not a naive or simplistic nationalism, but a dialogue with the nation's historical and cultural constituents.

Malaysia's new nation-making may be a nascent multiculturalism quite distinct from models in the United States and elsewhere. Taking the cue from theater in Malaysia, the particular sense of pluralism and hybridity that is being broached may be rendered in linguistic exchange. Social life is negotiated through conversations in a variety of languages and accents, resting on the participants' linguistic breadth. At the same time, much goes on where one party watches and listens silently to a language spoken that is unintelligible or partially intelligible, typically comprehending a lot or enough merely as a result of this practiced behavior. Two key things mark this interaction. First, there is no overarching dominant language or rule, as is the case say in the United States with English. Second, much operates on the basis of empathy rather than tolerance. This does not mean that concern is overtly expressed for "the other" but that there is an ability and desire to accept and perhaps even comprehend a strange language in the gaze of the listener. At least as expressed in linguistic terms, differences between cultures are not regarded as alienating. Malaysian multiculturalism, so to speak, may be distinct and challenging. For this alone, it deserves further analysis notwithstanding the numerous social trends running against its grain.

It would be simplistic to conclude from these linguistic examples that ethnocultural differences in the country are being renegotiated with real ease. Much else has to be considered in attempting to understand the course of pluralism—not least in this regard is political economy. This essay is unable to arrive at a conclusive view with regard to the historical value of the pluralist efforts in the arts today. Nevertheless, it suggests little doubt about the significance of these efforts. Members of the arts community radically challenge the everyday rendering of the country in the ethnicized image, word, sound, and movement, by offering resonantly transethnic alternatives. They articulate the pluralist trends existing in society. They give meaning and direction to these trends through art and arts activism. Thus the arts gives substance, sense, and cohesion to the cultural solidarity that may be, or is, Malaysian.

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# 6

# Corporate Pluralism

## Singapore Inc. and the Association of Muslim Professionals

*Sharon Siddique*

Sixty years ago, John S. Furnivall, the British scholar-bureaucrat who first coined the term *plural society*, wrote a brilliant book that has been largely ignored ever since (Furnivall 1939). One chapter, entitled "Plural Economy," has a universality that deserves to be seriously revisited for two reasons. First, it lays out a fascinating thesis on the unique character of economic and political life in a plural society. Second, it was written at a time when colonial powers and colonial scholars were realizing that their world was about to change irrevocably. But in the late 1930s there was still no clear sense of where, when, and how the forces of change would be unleashed. This lent a fascinating urgency and poignancy to the intellectual struggle of making sense of the plural societies that the colonial powers had created.

The first section of this essay reassembles some of Furnivall's most relevant analytical tools, and revisits his options list for the evolution of plural societies. His primary contribution is a formidable argument to support his contention that plural societies differ fundamentally from more homogeneous societies in the manner and form in which economic and political life is rationalized and organized.

The second section leaves Furnivall and enters the world of Singapore, and more specifically, the case study promised in the title. Although Furnivall illustrated his thesis primarily with reference to the Netherlands Indies, his thoughts are still penetrating when applied to a state that was beyond his imagination—the Republic of Singapore. The route has to be

circuitous because the apparent paradox is so large. The Association of Muslim Professionals is strikingly and unmistakably Singaporean. At the same time, it is an emphatically Muslim organization run for Muslims, by Muslims. How can this be so? To his credit, Furnivall provides some of the building blocks to construct an answer.

The third section carries the argument one final step further. Although Furnivall might not have imagined Singapore, he would probably not have been surprised at Singapore's achievements, or the institutions that have been created to mold this multiracial society. In the third section we pose a slightly heretical question: Is Singapore successful at being plural because it is dynamic? Or is Singapore successful at being dynamic because it is plural? Following Furnivall's logic, the answer is more likely the latter.

## Furnivall's Theory

Perhaps the most important reason why the concept of plural society has fallen into disfavor is that it is one of those terms that became overgeneralized. Once "plural" became interchangeable with "multiracial," "complex," "cosmopolitan," and "heterogeneous," it lost its relevance as a theoretical tool. What society is not "heterogeneous" to some extent?

As also noted in the introduction to the present book, one has to acknowledge from the start that Furnivall's definition of plural society needs some qualifying. "A society comprising two or more elements or social orders which live side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit" (1939, 446) is too simplistic for the twenty-first century. Sixty years ago, the political unit of the independent nation-state was not even imaginable in Southeast Asia. In this context, Furnivall's definition is therefore most useful as a starting point from which to understand the dynamics of contemporary plural societies.

Furnivall insists that there are distinctive characteristics in the political and economic spheres of life in plural societies, which distinguish them from more homogeneous societies. The most fundamental difference is the lack of a common social will. Liberal economic theory posits a homogeneous society, assumes a common social will, and emphasizes the role of the individual as the primary economic actor. Furnivall says the lack of a common social will has two far-reaching consequences in plural societies: first, it leads to an emphasis on economic production; and second, to a fragmentation of social demand. Economic production becomes the plural society's unifying focus. This is so because the economic test is the only test that the various communities can apply in common. Thus, "the fundamental character of the organization of a plural society as a whole is the

structure of a factory, organized for production" (1939, 450). Plural societies are obsessed with the marketplace because it is the only common ground on which all various sections of a plural society can agree. As Furnivall so succinctly puts it, "if they want the same thing, they will all prefer to get it for two pence rather than for three pence" (1939, 449). The problem is that the constituent communities seldom want the same thing.

Furnivall builds his argument by introducing the concept of social demand, which in his terminology means the rationale for organizing consumption. In a plural society, social demand is fragmented. Each community in a plural society has its own value system and, therefore, its own organization of social demand. In a homogeneous society, it is assumed that social demand is tempered by a common social morality and controlled by a common social will. In a plural society, each constituent community provides its own blueprint for tempering and controlling.

Going further, Furnivall argues that economic and political agendas in homogeneous and plural societies are distinctively different. In homogeneous societies "the end of political science is to provide most adequately for the expression of social will, and the end of political economy is to provide most adequately for the satisfaction of social and individual demand. Whereas in a plural society the needs are respectively to integrate society and to organize social demand" (1939, 463).

Furnivall was not terribly sanguine about the political and economic future of plural societies. He could identify the problems—politically, to integrate society; and economically to organize social demand. But he could not envisage a political structure capable of ensuring stability within a plural society. In part this was because he considered the constituent communities within a plural society as inherently flawed. He regarded them, by nature, as unable to cope with the problem of piecing their societal puzzle into a unified whole. He saw two main weaknesses. First, such communities expended their creative energies in boundary maintenance—in ensuring that they remained distinctly different. Second, this lack of cultural dynamism was further reinforced by their preoccupation with economic aspects of social life—a concern that provided the primary link with other communities. Furnivall tried to imagine a way out of this conundrum. He surveyed colonial plural societies, and came up with four possible models for integrating society and organizing social demand: a caste system; a rule of law system; a nationalist system; and a federalist system.

He acknowledged that a caste system, perfected in British India and practiced in other British, Portuguese, and Dutch colonies, whereby the Europeans simply grafted themselves onto the apex of the system, did produce stability. However, he rejected it as a viable solution because, "for European and Oriental alike, caste affords no prospect of a final resolution of the

strain inherent in a plural society" (1939, 465). Thus a caste system extracted too high a price because it was based on the assumption that one particular community was inherently, and irrevocably, superior to the others.

Furnivall acknowledged that the rule of law solution had merit. He found it appealing because it was quite successful in providing an enabling framework for the economic process. But it did not occur to Furnivall that a plural society could itself evolve a common rule of law. Thus he ultimately rejected this option because he felt that the grafting of an alien legal system onto a plural society could never be based on a collective or consensual will; the system would end, then, by being divisive.

Next, Furnivall considers nationalism. His rejection of nationalism is also steeped in colonial logic. In the 1930s, he could see no further than to observe that "difficulties have already been experienced in applying the doctrine of nationalism where there is no nation." This inherent lack of a common social will would mean that "voting carries very little weight except as an index to the force behind it." In fact, he considered nationalism particularly dangerous in a plural society because he assumed that each community would develop its own nationalism, aggravating societal instability and "enhancing the need for it to be held together by some force exerted from outside" (1939, 459).

Finally, Furnivall offers federalism, the Dutch solution. In the context of a plural society, the federal system would embrace constituent communities, rather than constituent territories. He felt that federalism could offer a partial solution to the economic problem of a plural society by at least allowing each constituent community to organize its own social demand. But the federal model, as far as he could perceive it, did not resolve the political problem of how to integrate these communities into a single political unit.

In short, a satisfactory solution to the issue of nation-making in a plural society eluded Furnivall, and he concluded his section on "Resolutions of Plural Economy" on a particularly gloomy note. "Whether the Federal System of the Dutch or the Nationalist System of the English will be more successful only time can show; if, that is, time allows for the conduct of either experiment to any end but anarchy" (1939, 469).

## http://www.amp.org.sg

Furnivall would undoubtedly have been stunned by Singapore. He would also have been relieved to see that the result of the great plural society experiment that he so correctly anticipated has at least not yet ended in

anarchy, as he had feared. But once he had settled in, he probably would have felt that the Singapore solution to the plural society conundrum made sense. Singapore characterizes itself as a multiracial, multicultural, multilingual society. Each constituent community is allowed a great deal of freedom to develop its own language, culture, and social organization. The debates on what constitute the unifying elements of "Singaporean identity" continue to rage (Arun and Lee 1998; Wee 1998).

He would also not be surprised to see the emphasis that has been placed on the nature and scope of economic competitiveness. He would also not be surprised to see that achieving economic success is a national obsession. He would find it logical that the constituent communities in this plural society would have evolved community self-help groups charged with ensuring that their respective community achieves maximum participation in the economic life of the larger society.

Furnivall might also have been struck by the logic of what he had missed. He had failed to anticipate that, in an independent plural society, the state would become the ultimate mediator among constituent communities. It is the state that performs the political task of integrating society and the economic task of organizing social demand. And he would have been fascinated at how this has been achieved in Singapore. Meritocracy motivates the various communities to subscribe to a common vision of economic development. The system functions because the state is perceived as neutral in this process of nation-making. It does not favor one community over another.

Following the logic of a plural society, if Singapore's self help-groups did not exist, they would have to be invented. Beginning in the 1980s with MENDAKI (Council for the Education of Muslim Children), and followed by the CDAC (Chinese Development Assistance Council), SINDA (Singapore Indian Development Association), the Eurasian Association, and, finally, in 1991, the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP), these groups have galvanized community support for the national agenda of promoting the conditions for market-oriented growth. Each community is tasked to uplift its own community. But the goals are shared: upgrade the skills of the community's labor force; attain higher educational achievement for the community's student population; and alleviate social problems that prevent the community from achieving competitiveness in the economic and educational fields.

A closer look at the AMP allows a more detailed view of how the system functions. Singapore is a wired society. Most Singaporean organizations, public and private, as well as many individuals, have websites. The government has set the standard, and the most impressive is http://www.gov.sg.

Websites are professionally constructed and interactive, with elaborate hyperlinks to affiliates and associates. The AMP is no exception.

The AMP website provides a convenient map that can be used to explore how the AMP officially perceives itself, and the language it uses to express these orientations. A website is graphic in the same way a map is. It reduces complexity. Scrolling through the website materials, it is obvious that the AMP presents itself in a transparent and straightforward manner. Information is very detailed. Alternative communication channels, including telephone numbers, fax numbers, street addresses, and e-mail addresses, are all user-friendly. From the home page, the visitor can click on to a cyber counselor "if you have something to get off your chest," or a vox box "if you have any enquiries, comments or feedback." There are also hotlinks to "check the latest websites through a friendly link provided by AMP."

In addition to these side attractions, the main menu bar provides links to various AMP activities, centers, departments, and programs. Through all this, the markers that identify AMP as Singaporean become obvious. They can be broadly grouped into three clusters:

- Self-Image
- Organization and Activities
- Networking

### *Self-Image*

In Singapore, definitions are important and always up front. Vision and mission statements have come to be considered obligatory for any organization—irrespective of its government or private status. And the AMP is no exception.

"AMP's vision is to bring about a model Muslim minority community." The words of the vision are carefully chosen. AMP's focus is the Muslim minority community, and its purpose is to offer a model for transforming the community. This vision is further elaborated in the mission statement:

> AMP's mission is to play a leading and active role in the development and long term transformation of Malay/Muslim Singaporeans into a dynamic community taking its pride of place in the larger Singaporean society. It is a community that is educationally excellent, economically dynamic, socially progressive, culturally vibrant and politically influential.

AMP views Malay/Muslim Singaporeans as a dynamic community within a larger Singaporean society—in other words, as a component of a plural society. But the goals it sets in order for the community to be transformed into a model community are quintessentially Singaporean, in the sense that they have become the commonly established national goals to which all of Singapore's ethnic communities aspire: "educationally excellent," "economically dynamic," "socially progressive," "culturally vibrant," "politically influential."

Of AMP's goals, the first three receive the greatest emphasis and are more fully articulated. In the Singapore mind-set, they are interlinked. In meritocratic Singapore, achieving a level playing field in the education system and ensuring that Malay-Muslim children perform on a par with children of other ethnic groups (Chinese, Indian, Eurasian) are the AMP's primary preoccupations. Enhanced educational performance, in turn, is perceived as the key that unlocks the door to better job opportunities and incomes. Leveling the playing field also entails striving to alleviate the social problems linked with poverty, low education, and low income, including drug abuse, divorce, and absenteeism. Economic success in turn makes possible the achievement of AMP's broader social, cultural, and, finally, political, aspirations for the Malay-Muslim community.

For the AMP, again reflecting the general Singaporean worldview, this mission is emphatically future-oriented: "In the 21st century, knowledge and skills will become outdated faster as technological development accelerates. Our youths' future in tomorrow's economy hinge on their ability to continually learn and acquire new skills."

### *Organization and Activities*

The AMP's description of its institutional status also marks it as uniquely Singaporean. In Singapore the status of NGOs in particular and civil society in general is contentious (see Chua 1995, and Chua and Kwok in this book). Officially registering an NGO is not a straightforward matter, and requires a fairly sophisticated negotiation process.

> The Association of Muslim Professionals is a community self-help group established on 10 October 1991 as a company limited by guarantee. AMP is granted the status of an Institution of Public Character and is registered as a charitable organization.

The term *community self-help group* has a special meaning in Singapore. From the early 1980s, the government encouraged each community

(Chinese, Malay, Eurasian) to set up a self-help group on the assumption that ethnic communities are best equipped to tackle community problems. All self-help groups focus on raising educational standards among their respective community's youth and upgrading the community's workforce skills. Social problems, such as drugs and high divorce rates, are also addressed. As Chua and Kwok also note in their essay in this book, the AMP is one of two self-help groups working in the Malay-Muslim community (the other being MENDAKI—Council for the Development of the Singapore Muslim Community).

AMP's organizational structure and legal status also conform to a uniquely Singaporean pattern. In Singapore, NGOs have the choice of registering themselves as a society under the Societies Act, or as "a company limited by guarantee." The AMP, then, is not just structured like a company, it *is* a company. In Singapore, such a company can also apply for the status of Institution of Public Character, which allows it to register as a charitable organization. This has important implications for taxation and fund-raising.

AMP has three divisions: Corporate Services, Education and Training, and Al Hijrah. The fourth division—Research—was privatized in 1997 as a wholly owned subsidiary company, The Center for Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs (RIMA).

Corporate Services is the nerve-center of the organization. It has four departments: finance, administration, and human resources; corporate affairs; fund-raising; and management information systems. As in any well-run Singaporean company, Corporate Services has bought into management enhancement courses offered through the Singapore Productivity and Standards Board (PSB), such as the Management Development Program and the People Developer Standard Program. In 1998 AMP also began implementing Total Quality Management (TQM) throughout the organization. Thus the AMP corporate culture subscribes to the basic orientation of the Singapore corporate culture, which is actively disseminated through Singapore government institutions, in particular, the PSB.

AMP's largest division is Education and Training. Educational programs are grouped on the website under "Pinnacle of Education [Mercu Pendidikan]." Mercu Pendidikan is promoted as a plan to assist students to go beyond ten years of basic education and secure higher education or skills-training at universities, polytechnics, and the ITE. The latest Ministry of Education initiatives are monitored, and AMP's educational programs are constantly being adapted to Singapore's fluid educational policies. Recently, for example, new elements have been added "in tandem with the Education Ministry's new approach towards the 'Thinking School,

Learning Nation.'" According to Ismail Ibrahim, executive director of AMP, "these include a good foundation in IT skills, the ability to process information, and also, strong communication skills. We are looking at mental dexterity, creativity, and technical ability."

Likewise, Training Center activities are geared to "increase workers' competitiveness so that they remain gainfully employed and enjoy higher earning capacity." TP21 is AMP's five-year plan to upgrade the skills of Malay-Muslim workers to increase their trainability and employability. The term "21" has become a code word for all manner of twenty-first-century agendas and five-year plans in Singapore. All fall under the umbrella Singapore 21 Vision, launched by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in April 1999. "Singapore 21: Together, We Make The Difference" can be accessed at http://www.gov.sg/singapore21.

The Al Hijrah Division is the social arm of the organization. Principal activities include counseling, help line service, befrienders service, youth enrichment programs, and marriage guidance courses. The division also runs training programs for volunteers.

In 1997 the AMP initiated Gerakan Al Hijrah (Al Hijrah Movement) to motivate the community to become more proactive in tackling social problems. The name signifies the decentralization of the division's services from its main center in the east of Singapore, to outlying neighborhoods in the north and west of the city. As a direct result of government housing policies, which have placed a percentage cap on the ethnic mix in public housing, the Malay-Muslim community does not have a territorial center (Ooi, Siddique, and Soh 1993).

Finally, there is the Center for Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs, or RIMA. AMP considers research vital to propose new solutions to the community's problems and to produce guidelines to ensure that its aspirations are met. RIMA currently has a research program, a consultancy service, a scholarship program, a seminars program, a publication program, and a resource center The primary reason for privatizing RIMA was to create a more independent research facility into which other Malay-Muslim community organizations could tap. At present, AMP is RIMA's principal client, although some projects are currently under joint sponsorship.

AMP currently has a staff of over one hundred full-time and part-time paid employees, and several hundred more individuals who volunteer their services in particular capacities. AMP child care, educational, and training services are offered at a number of locations around the island, including various mosques, AMP's headquarters on Haig Road, and the AMP's new commercial premises on Changi Road, which the company recently purchased for S$4.8million.

Finally, there is the question of company financing. Although AMP's budget is not published on the website, the AMP Annual Report 1997–1998 provides an overview of the finances of AMP "Inc." During FY 1997–1998, AMP had an income of S$7,247,396, and an expenditure of S$5,826,765. These are solid numbers by any company standard. Income and expenditure breakdowns were as follows:

| **Income** | **$** |
|---|---|
| Donations | 2,585,557 |
| Government grant | 1,705,706 |
| CPF check-offs | 224,629 |
| School fees | 502,901 |
| Fund-raising and other income | 1,494,150 |
| Child care center services fees and subsidies | 676,553 |
| Government MCD grant | 57,900 |
| **Total income** | **7,247,396** |

| **Expenditure** | **$** |
|---|---|
| Network of preschools | 570,594 |
| Lower primary program | 128,212 |
| Upper primary program | 317,054 |
| Social action program | 757,335 |
| Early childhood and family education program | 145,299 |
| Education enrichment Programs | 472,893 |
| Research | 243,826 |
| Child care center | 642,795 |
| Contributions for community projects | 1,751,127 |
| Fund-raising expenses | 797,630 |
| **Total expenditure** | **5,826,765** |

Income is thus derived from three primary sources: government grants and subsidies, individual and corporate donations, and revenue generated through training and educational courses. Expenditures support the network of activities, programs, research, and, in keeping with AMP's need to raise revenue, fund-raising expenses.

Courses are run on a cost recovery basis, but fees are kept to a minimum by looking for sponsors, matching grants available from government educational and training schemes, and cost-sharing with other Malay-Muslim organizations. There is nothing generic about course offerings. They are geared to the specific needs of the Malay-Muslim

community in Singapore. The vocabulary used in describing and promoting the various courses is a fascinating blend of English terms which have such a special meaning that they would often not be understood by those unfamiliar with the Singapore education and training system, spiced with a distinctive Malay flavor. For example, EMAS (English, Maths, and Science) is an acronym for the core curriculum in Singapore primary and secondary schools. But *emas* in Malay also means "gold." AMP offers EMAS courses at various levels from Primary 1 to Secondary 5, two times per week for two hours per session, at a cost of between $70 and $100 per month. SWAT (Speakers, Writers, Thinkers) courses target good students from the Express stream. Here the reference to the management term *swat analysis* is quite sophisticated. AMP offers SWAT courses twice a week for two hours, at a cost of $70 to $100 per month. In recognition of their important role in student motivation, AMP offers PIL (Partners in Learning) for parents, consisting of four modules, costing $100.

Believing that attitudes toward education are formed when children are very young—a belief shared by most other Singaporeans—AMP operates two child care centers situated in the HDB heartlands (Yishun and Woodlands) in the northern part of Singapore. The centers offer a full-day program for children between eighteen months and five years old. The curriculum includes English, mother tongue, music and art, physical activities, and computer appreciation. The fee is $380 per month for the full day program, but working mothers enjoy a subsidy of $150 offered by Ministry of Community Development (MCD). Further financial assistance for low-income families is available from the AMP and the National Council of Social Service.

AMP Training Centers offer management, computer, and language courses for workers, entrepreneurs, retirees, and housewives. Specialized technical training programs target Malay workers who lack formal educational qualifications. For example, one of the four new courses introduced in July 1999 is called Workplace Skills Training (WST); the course takes place over five months, two evenings per week. At the end of the course, the participant qualifies for the ITE (Institute of Technical Education) Best 4 certificate (Equivalent to Primary 6). The WST course fee is $290.

### *Networking*

AMP places a high priority on networking and community involvement. This can be traced to AMP corporate history. AMP was established in October 1991 as a direct result of brainstorming at the National Convention

of Singapore Malay-Muslim Professionals, which was held in October 1990 and attended by some five hundred participants.

AMP's networking with other Malay-Muslim community groups is extensive. In general, networking is conducted on a project basis when a common goal can best be achieved through a broader community initiative. For example, AMP is currently cooperating with MENDAKI and MUIS (Islamic Religious Council of Singapore) in Project CERAH (Complete Retrenchment Assistance Scheme). The scheme is designed to assist Malay-Muslims who lose their jobs in the current economic downturn. Participants are offered job referrals and career guidance; two-week intensive skills training; seminars on coping and managing with retrenchment; and the option to participate in other courses, such as vocational-, office skill-, and IT-training.

AMP strives for a broad-based participation of individuals from the Malay-Muslim community. It actively recruits volunteers, and solicits funds from Malay-Muslims who can arrange to contribute to the organization on a monthly basis via an AMP savings account. Such investments of time and money are given public recognition—everyone is listed by name and thanked in the Annual Report (AMP Annual Report, 1997–1998).

AMP also networks with the private sector, most notably by seeking corporate sponsorship for various activities. Private-sector individuals are also recruited to contribute their expertise and advice with regard to the development and execution of AMP's educational and training programs.

The AMP also has a close networking relationship with relevant Singapore government institutions, such as the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Community Development, and various schools, training institutes, and tertiary educational institutions. AMP is an affiliate of the National Council for Social Service (NCSS). Government support for AMP is largely on a project basis. AMP is also eligible for various government matching-fund schemes and other sources of government funding.

Furnivall emphasized that in a plural society, each community was in charge of organizing its own social demand, providing its own rationale for organizing consumption. The case study of the AMP illustrates just how this process functions in Singapore. AMP is run for Malay-Muslims by Malay-Muslims. But the vocabulary it uses to express its community vision borrows extensively from the state's vision for Singaporean society. This explains why there is very little "Muslim" about the AMP website, which is in English. The word *Islam* is not mentioned once. There are no "religious" courses on offer. Even AMP's use of the term *hijrah* is, interestingly, explained in rather secular terms: "*Hijrah* is an Arabic term which means

to make a journey. The term is also associated with one's effort to improve his/her life. AMP adopts this term to highlight the importance of building a better future for Malay-Muslim families." Scrolling to language courses offered, there are some more surprises. One would expect courses in Malay, or perhaps even English or Arabic, but the one course on offer via the web page is "Basic Conversational Mandarin," which is billed as "giving non-Mandarin speaking participants an opportunity to communicate verbally using simple Mandarin sentences (24 hours; $190 per participant)."

One obvious explanation for this lack of an "Islamic" focus is that the AMP is a niche organization within the overall constellation of Malay-Muslim institutions in Singapore. There are a host of organizations that cater to specific aspects of Malay-Muslim cultural life—including courses in Arabic and religious knowledge. Another possible explanation is that the AMP caters to an exclusively Muslim audience. Therefore, the religious worldview, value system, and motivational impetus on which the organization is based are all simply taken for granted. Both explanations illustrate the power of community. The world of the AMP website is a uniquely Singaporean Malay-Muslim world. The calendar of events, the activities, and the hyperlinks to other organizations are all vertical links within the community. They also reinforce the fact that Singapore is a plural society.

In sum, AMP is a successful company/community self-help group—a true, homegrown, Singaporean NGO. But beyond merely describing AMP in its Singapore context, can this case study be used to propose a new model to address Furnivall's conundrum?

## Corporate Pluralism

Early-twenty-first-century capitalism is now proclaiming its universality. But it is also becoming increasingly clear that laissez-faire economic liberalism cannot escape from the fact that it is based on the assumption of a common social will that enforces some sort of morality on the marketplace (see the introduction to this book, and Hefner 1998). Economic liberalism assumes, in Furnivall's terms, a homogeneous society. In such a society, the key political focus is to provide for the expression of social will, while the key economic focus is to provide for the satisfaction of social demand. The individual is the focal point. A democratic polity is the vehicle.

Plural societies are different because they inherently lack this common social will. Each constituent community through its representative institutions is a self-contained unit. In a plural society, the key political focus

is to integrate the society, while the key economic focus must be to organize social demand. The constituent communities are the focal point, and the individual's role is mediated through her or his membership in one of them (in fact, she or he must belong to one of them). What type of polity is the vehicle?

Homogeneous and plural societies are in juxtaposition. Furnivall did not envision that a plural society could be transformed into a homogeneous society. For him, the alternative to an unsuccessful plural society was anarchy. A homogeneous society can be complex. It can evolve a class structure; it can embrace multiculturalism. But the issue of a common social will remains fundamental. A plural society is self-perpetuating. The constituent communities can be integrated, but they cannot be assimilated into some greater whole. Similarly, common principles for regulating social demand can be introduced, but any common value system cannot be at the expense of each community's right to articulate this, literally, in its own language.

A plural society is by nature rather fragile and weak. Community interests must be balanced through a process of constant mediation. Interest groups—based on class, gender, age, or activity—must be filtered through the pluralist prism, resulting in the fragmentation of their potential as lobby groups within a larger societal context (Chua 1995 misses this). The option of "opting out" is ever present (Kwok and Ali 1998).

Furnivall ultimately failed in his own search for a societal model in which individuals as members of constituent communities could simultaneously continue to build a distinctive identity at the community level and evolve a common social will at the societal level. He could not imagine a solution to the political problem of societal integration, or the economic problem of the organization of social demand. He could not imagine a state that provided the integrative mechanism, and the common vision, to facilitate and sustain "mingling in one political unit."

But this failure does not invalidate his assumptions. It merely places him squarely at the end of the colonial era, when the current configuration of Southeast Asian nation-states was quite inconceivable. The ultimate test of the validity of Furnivall's theory is whether or not the process of nation-making in plural societies over the past sixty years has conformed to his logic. Furnivall would have anticipated a plural state that was organized and rationalized according to an economic imperative. He opted for the analogy of a factory geared for production. In the late-twentieth-century variation, the analogy of a corporation is more powerful. Singapore Inc. is a modern holding company, with its citizens all shareholders and its institutions all geared to achieving maximum efficiency in a larger

(business) world of winners and losers. Like any successful corporation, Singapore Inc. must incessantly reinvent itself and refine its corporate vision and mission statements to retain its competitive edge.

But Furnivall would not have been satisfied with a model that merely solved the problem of forging a common social will—a common corporate vision. The test would be whether or not community leaders would internalize this common will and translate it into the vocabulary and value systems of their own individual communities (PuruShotam 1998). A successful model would have to demonstrate that it could ensure that the social demands of each community could be mobilized and subordinated within a larger societal integrative framework—a single political unit (Chan 1975). Our case study of the AMP demonstrates just how complex this reality actually is.

Furnivall would certainly have been curious to know how constituent communities themselves had evolved. To stretch our analogy a bit further, if Singapore is a holding company, then communities, or at least the institutions that represent them, can be considered as subsidiaries. This is true for our case study, which is, quite literally, a company. AMP is even busily setting up its own subsidiaries, as with, for example, RIMA.

What, then, are the key characteristics of the relationship between the holding company (Singapore Inc.) and the subsidiary (AMP)? The subsidiary enjoys a fair measure of autonomy. It has its own administration and manages its own finances. It designs and markets its own brand of products, catering to its niche clientele (the Malay-Muslim community). To the extent that it is at least partially financially dependent, the subsidiary relies on corporate approval and largesse. But the holding company also needs the subsidiary. The subsidiary guarantees the corporation access to a niche clientele that it might not otherwise be in a position to reach.

It is thus within the interests of all parties to sustain the system. To understand why, we must return to the corporate analogy. It is in the interest of each subsidiary to retain its niche clientele. If its clientele begins to identify too closely with the larger corporation, its market niche, and hence its rationale for existence, will be eroded. Logic dictates that the niche should be retained—that the move toward a more homogeneous society must be resisted. Thus the interests of the subsidiary and the holding company overlap, but they are never allowed to merge.

In other words, there must be no poaching. It is ultimately in each community's interest to perpetuate difference—vis-à-vis the holding company and also among each other. This places each subsidiary in an essentially weak position, as it must expend its creative energies in boundary maintenance. This is why the holding company must assume the burden

of an additional function—it must mediate among the various subsidiaries, because no subsidiary is in a position to act as mediator. For example, the AMP dedicates itself to the transformation of Malay-Muslim Singaporeans into a dynamic community and it leaves the management and coordination of the larger Singaporean society to the state.

This symbiosis between subsidiaries and holding company is much more complex than a simple authoritarian relationship. The need to organize social demand may well be the key to understanding the state's preeminent role in economic development. Likewise, the various constituent communities cannot integrate themselves without a neutral, mediating force. Thus the dominant role of state may, in fact, be determined by the very nature of the plural society that has evolved.

Elements of Furnivall's legal, nationalist, and federalist models, as they have evolved, can be incorporated into the corporate pluralist model outlined above. The key to a common legal framework acceptable to all is to ensure that it is perceived as equitable. It cannot be seen to favor members of one community over members of another. Yet maintaining the principle of meritocracy is a constant struggle. Performance targets must be agreed on, and performance measurements must be exemplary. In Singapore this has been resolved by benchmarking (for example, examination results) against the national norms, as well as against other communities.

The state can employ nationalism to forge a common social will, but it will always be in tension with the constituent communities who translate this vision into their respective languages and worldviews—as the AMP does for the Malay-Muslim community. When does a translation become a separate message? The imperative to constantly promote new, more competitive visions may also be a liability as there is a danger that "vision fatigue" may set in.

The federalist element addresses the need for a common social contract. Self-help groups derive their strength from their community base. Straying too far from community interests erodes their power. The state must also ensure that the federalist element is not realized territorially. If a particular community has a territorial base, then there is potential to exercise the option of separation. In Singapore, housing policies ensure that the various communities are integrated by imposing ethnic quotas. In a plural society, the state mediates the implementation of the social contract.

In sum, a corporatist pluralist model contains five basic elements:

- The state is organized as a holding company; the constituent communities as subsidiaries.

- All citizens are shareholders in the holding company and clients of a designated subsidiary.
- The state formulates the corporate vision and mission, and the subsidiaries translate these and implement them with the assistance of the state.
- Performance targets and measurements are agreed on and collectively monitored.
- Any cooperative ventures are subsidized by the state, and any conflicts are mediated by the state.

Finally, what type of polity can serve as the vehicle for corporate pluralism? All Singaporeans are shareholders in Singapore Inc. The holding company is managed by the board of directors and the officials they appoint. As long as the majority of Singaporeans continue to feel that it is in their best economic interests to retain the present management, they will continue to vote in democratic elections for the PAP and return them to power. But this is no simple "one-man, one-vote" democracy. It is mediated by the block voting potential of the members of the constituent communities, and is very sensitive to the vicissitudes of the marketplace.

Singapore, therefore, may well be successful at being dynamic because it is plural. Singapore Inc. must constantly reinvent itself, proving to its shareholders that it is indeed world-class. The company must continue to expand, the profits must increase, and the shareholders must expect impressive dividends. All this must continue to take place in an extremely competitive international environment. And it must continue despite the domestic tensions inherent in the relationships between the holding company and its subsidiaries, and among the subsidiaries. If one constituent community decides to dominate, or if one should become so weak as to be a liability, or if one decides that it is no longer convinced by the corporate vision, then the holding company is in trouble and the board, eventually, may be voted out of office.

In sum, it can be argued that this corporate pluralist model has simply been constructed on the basis of the Singapore case study. This would be selling the power of Furnivall short. Although it is beyond the scope of this present study, it would be fascinating to test (and perhaps elaborate) this model on other plural societies with which Furnivall was familiar. Recent events in Indonesia and Malaysia certainly appear to provide tantalizing testing grounds. In Indonesia, current political and economic debates swirl around the very issues that obsessed Furnivall—the efficacy of the legal system; the nature of federalism; and the character of nationalism. Malaysia, meanwhile, has for the first time in its history, presented an

Alternative Front (Barisan Alternatif) to the hegemonic position hitherto occupied by the incumbent National Front. In 1939, Furnivall could not imagine beyond the confines of his colonial worldview. It is now our ultimate challenge to attempt to anticipate the direction which these plural societies will take in the twenty-first century.

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# 7

# Where Has (Ethnic) Politics Gone?

## The Case of the BN Non-Malay Politicians and Political Parties

*Francis Loh Kok Wah*

It is significant that the dual economic and political crises confronting Malaysia since 1997 have not resulted in ethnic conflagration as has occurred in neighboring Indonesia. It is also significant that the supporters of former deputy prime minister cum UMNO (United Malays National Organization) deputy president, Anwar Ibrahim, subsequently launched a new multiethnic party, the Justice Party (or Parti keADILan), to further their struggle for social and political reform and to contest the November 1999 general elections. They did not launch, as they could have, an equivalent of Semangat 46, a Malay-based party formed by an earlier group of UMNO dissidents in the late 1980s to challenge UMNO's stranglehold over the Malays. It is further noteworthy that keADILan has joined hands with the other opposition parties including the Chinese-based Democratic Action Party (DAP) and the Malay-based Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS) to forge a new multiethnic opposition coalition, the Barisan Alternatif (BA, "Alternative Front"). More so than any other previous multiethnic opposition effort, the BA has picked up considerable grassroots support across the various ethnic groups.

The restructuring of Malaysian society under the auspices of the New Economic Policy (NEP, 1971–1990), which has resulted in the emergence of Malay business and middle classes, helps to explain the lessening of ethnic tensions in Malaysia in the late 1990s. However, these recent developments do not suggest that the discourse of ethnicism (of which the NEP itself is a part), the dominant discourse in Malaysian politics at least until

the late 1980s, will now be replaced by the counter-discourse of democracy. No doubt, this counter-discourse has been given a boost as a result of Anwar Ibrahim's sacking and incarceration in 1998–1999. But the democratic discourse will not so easily prevail and capture the imaginings of all sectors of Malaysian society. This is because a discourse of developmentalism now predominates among certain groups in Malaysia.

Emerging in the early 1970s, when the Malaysian state seriously launched its plans to promote rapid economic growth so as to achieve NEP objectives, the discourse of developmentalism came into its own during the 1990s when the Malaysian economy achieved double-digit growth rates. It is this discourse of developmentalism, not the discourse of ethnicism, that will pose limits to the counter-discourse of democracy in the following decade. I wish to show that this is the case especially among non-Malays, who during the 1990s began to identify themselves with the National Front/Barisan Nasional (BN) government. These non-Malays, who perceived themselves to have been discriminated against by the pro-Malay affirmative action policies during the NEP years, now welcomed the liberalization of economic and cultural policies by the BN government, which created new opportunities for non-Malays.

## From Ethnicism to Developmentalism

Elsewhere (Loh 2000) I have elaborated on UMNO's "cultural liberalization" policies and the non-Malay Barisan Nasional (BN) parties' withdrawal from ethnically sensitive issues in the 1990s. No doubt, ethnicity remains salient in multiethnic Malaysia, but ethnicity has also become less politicized than in previous decades. In part this stems from growing non-Malay acquiescence to the terms of governance that are predicated on Malay political and cultural preeminence. However, the UMNO-led BN government also introduced a series of policies in the 1990s that, taken together, might be interpreted as moving toward "cultural liberalization," especially when viewed from the perspective of non-Malays. These policies also helped to ease ethnic tensions.

Briefly, UMNO leaders deemphasized or redefined the political significance of the most important emblems of Malay identity—the Malay rulers, Malay language and culture, and Islam—hitherto considered central attributes in the definition of a modern Malaysian nation-state. The symbolic and actual powers of the Malay rulers were curtailed as a result of UMNO's challenges to the rulers in 1983–1984 and again in 1994. While reaffirming the status of Malay as the national language, Prime Min-

ister Dr. Mahathir Mohamed and other UMNO leaders actually promoted the use of the English language on utilitarian grounds. For instance, English became the medium of instruction for certain subjects in the local universities, a move that partially reversed the policy introduced in 1971 of using Malay only as the medium of instruction. Additionally, the new Education Act of 1996 formally empowers the education minister to exempt the use of Malay as the medium of instruction for certain purposes deemed necessary even in schools. By introducing other new acts and amending certain existing acts pertaining to higher education, the government facilitated the corporatization of state universities, the setting up of private universities and branch campuses of foreign universities in Malaysia, and the sprouting of hundreds of private "twinning colleges" (which, although not allowed to award their own academic degrees, were permitted to conduct tertiary-level courses by "twinning" with foreign universities whose academic degrees were awarded instead). Since the private universities, branch campuses, and twinning colleges began to recruit foreign lecturers and were encouraged to recruit foreign students, English became the medium of instruction. Other notable aspects of cultural liberalization were the promotion of non-Malay cultures by the Ministry of Culture, Arts, and Tourism as a means of attracting the tourist dollar, and the increasing use of English, and to a lesser extent Chinese, in the mass media, especially by the privatized radio and television stations.

Finally, in response to the resurgence of Islam (a worldwide phenomena but which was initially spearheaded in the late 1970s by the opposition party PAS and other non-state Islamic NGOs), the UMNO-led BN government itself began to introduce various Islamization policies beginning in the early 1980s. But the BN distinguished itself by advocating a more liberal interpretation of Islam that emphasized the promotion of Islamic values in administration and in society writ large, rather than the realization of an Islamic state as advocated by PAS and some Muslim NGOs. Taken as a whole, the new policies appeared to initiate a shift from a more exclusive to a more inclusive notion of Malaysian nationhood. Most non-Malays welcomed this cultural liberalization.

Cultural liberalization was accompanied by a withdrawal of Chinese and Indian BN leaders from debates on national (and even international) issues, especially when they were controversial or "ethnically sensitive." For instance, most non-Malay ministers did not participate in the 1993–1994 debate on constitutional amendments proposing to remove the exempting of Malay rulers from legal prosecution. In general, the non-Malay leaders also shied away from public discussion of the position and role of Islam, although they were prepared to criticize the Islamization

policies of PAS and to condemn the Chinese-based opposition DAP for cooperating with the former in the run-up to the 1995 and 1999 general elections. When language, culture, and educational matters were discussed, it was often their utilitarianism and their relationship to development, indeed "self-help" efforts (discussed later), which were highlighted.

Significantly, political liberalization did not accompany cultural liberalization. Indeed, a strong state armed with the Internal Security Act (ISA, which allows for detention without trial) and other coercive laws was, and is still, in place. But the lag in democratization at least until 1998 was also due to the consolidation of the political culture of developmentalism. This discourse valorizes sustained economic growth that facilitates an improvement in one's material standard of living, including a measure of consumerism. The corollary to this is an emphasis on political stability. Growing numbers of Malaysians, including non-Malays who previously were anti-government, now believe only a strong state governed by the status quo coalition, the multiethnic BN, can guarantee this stability. The consolidation of BN rule in the 1995 general elections, when it polled 66 percent of the votes and won more than four-fifths of the total seats in parliament, is testimony to this reorientation. The BN's performance in 1995 reversed the trend of the previous decade, when its share of votes had declined in three consecutive general elections: in 1982 it polled 60.5 percent of the votes, in 1986 it was reduced to 57.6 percent, and in 1990 to 53.4 percent. Meanwhile in Sabah a UMNO-led BN government also came to power in 1994, admittedly amidst political intrigue. Nonetheless, it replaced the opposition Parti Bersatu Sabah that had held power for nine years. In neighboring Sarawak state, the Parti Bansa Dayak Sarawak, which had quit the BN coalition there in 1983 and unsuccessfully challenged the coalition in two successive state elections, returned to the BN fold in 1994. Indeed, Semangat 46, a UMNO splinter-group that posed a serious challenge in the 1990 elections, has also folded and its leaders and members have returned to UMNO.

This variant of developmentalism, defined to include an appreciation of political stability, and by extension rallying behind the BN, had begun to take hold in the political imaginings of the *bumiputera* ("indigenous") Malays earlier and especially after the New Economic Policy was launched in 1971 to facilitate *bumiputera* interests. But it was not until the 1990s that the ideology became prevalent among non-Malays, especially the non-Malay business and middle classes. And it did so principally because rapid economic growth occurred during that period. This growth was facilitated by deregulation of the economy and privatization that opened up new opportunities for the non-Malay business and middle classes.

There was then virtual full employment, with the result that foreign workers had to be imported to sustain high growth rates. In fact, lower-class Malaysians, including non-Malays, also enjoyed higher standards of living and even a measure of consumerism. The numerous mega-projects launched by the government made manifest and dramatized this developmentalism. However, it was perhaps made most tangible especially to ordinary non-Malays through the efforts of the non-Malay BN politicians and party machines. Through the efforts of the latter, "development," in the form of amenities and services, was brought to lower-class non-Malays at the local level.

In the remainder of this essay I want to highlight some everyday or mundane aspects of the role of the non-Malay BN politicians and political parties in the late 1990s. My intention is to complement the more dramatic discussions of the emergence of patronage politics and cronyism, of increasing executive dominance and authoritarianism, and of the high drama of the politics of central policy making, which others have ably demonstrated. I first discuss what is it that politicians (specifically the *wakil rakyat,* or elected representatives) do. My discussion focuses on their constituency work and the so-called service centers. Finally, I discuss how the parties also provide "services" beyond the constituency level. I hope to illustrate how developmentalism has taken hold in the political imaginings of ordinary Malaysians, especially non-Malays. I hope also to show that a new definition of politics is taking hold in Malaysia.

## What Do Politicians Do?

Let us look closely at the example of Bukit Bendera, one of the largest constituencies in the state of Penang. This parliamentary constituency, predominantly Chinese, is made up of three state assembly seats: Tanjong Bungah (as of 1998, some 24,222 registered voters), Kebun Bunga (20,792), and Air Itam (24,228). At the initial point of writing in 1999, the MP for Bukit Bendera is Chia Kwang Chye while the state assemblymen for the three state seats are, respectively, Dr. Koh Tsu Koon, Dr. Teng Hock Nam, and Lye Siew Weng. Except for Lye, who is a member of the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), the other *wakil rakyat* are members of the Gerakan Party. As members of the ruling Barisan Nasional, however, all four work closely together. I am particularly interested in the public roles and activities that they perform, not what they do behind closed doors in party meetings and assembly seatings. Since Koh is the chief minister of Penang and Teng the president of the Penang Island Municipal

Council (or Majlis Perbandaran Pulau Pinang, MPPP), both full-time positions, they have appointed special assistants to conduct their constituency work. Nonetheless, Chia, the MP, often represents them at various constituency functions. This is unavoidable since Chia's own parliamentary constituency encompasses both Koh's and Teng's state seats, and all three come from the same Parti Gerakan. Moreover, Koh and Teng also perform many other public functions related to their positions as executives in the state and municipal governments. To appreciate the public role of the *wakil rakyat*, therefore, I focus on Chia's role in particular, supplementing my discussion where necessary with references to the roles of the others. The information in the following discussion has been gathered from the bulletins issued by the *wakil rakyat*, interviews with the *wakil rakyat* or their special assistants, discussions during visits to their service centers, attendances at various functions, and reports in the local press.

One of the major endeavors assumed by most Barisan *wakil rakyat* nowadays is setting up the ubiquitous "service center." The service center, in fact, is the elected (or aspiring) politician's office, often located in the party's branch premises. Here, the *wakil rakyat* maintains his "office hours," ready to receive the public on specified days and hours, usually weekday evenings. Any assemblyman concerned about keeping in touch with the people she or he represents, therefore, will set up a service center *cum* office. In fact, Chia set up three service centers, one in each of the three state seats that made up his parliamentary constituency. He shared the same premises with Koh and Teng in two locales and scheduled similar "office hours" with them. Only in Air Itam, where the state assemblyman, Lye, comes from the MCA and operated out of the MCA's branch office, was it necessary for Chia to run a separate center. All in all, the Gerakan ran ten service centers in the state of Penang, one for each of their elected state assemblymen. Two of these centers, one in Bukit Mertajam on the mainland and the other in Tanjong Bunga, doubled up as a "Public Complaints Bureau." The state headquarters doubled up as yet another complaints bureau *cum* service center. Except for more specialized legal and labor-related problems, the public was usually advised to visit the service centers closest to their places of residence. In general, the *wakil rakyat* made it a point to be present in their centers at least for a few hours once a week. But since it was not uncommon for them to be absent occasionally, all the *wakil rakyat* appointed service assistants to handle urgent matters on their behalf. These assistants would often be swamped by individual requests of one kind or another usually pertaining to dealings with the government bureaucracy: filling out application forms for passports and identity cards, applying for various government subsidies or low-cost

houses, getting children into schools of the parents' choice, settling disputes with those providing utilities, and so on. Occasionally, whole communities might be threatened with eviction or relocation due to development projects.

Chia and the other representatives also created service "task forces" whose volunteers were recruited from the ranks of the local party branches. There was usually no lack of volunteers, since providing services to the public often became the principal activity, even the *raison d'être*, for the local branch when party and general elections were not around the corner. To "facilitate communication with the people," Chia also developed a homepage on the website.

However, the service centers would not be half as significant if funding was unavailable. As Barisan *wakil rakyat* however, Chia, Koh, Teng and Lye were eligible to receive Constituency Development Fund (CDF) allocations from the ruling Barisan government: RM300,000 (approximately U.S. $80,000) per year in the case of the MP, RM140,000 a year in the case of each assemblyman. Since Koh was chief minister, he was entitled to a higher allocation. The allocation was usually broken down into two "votes": one for roads, drains, and other minor public works projects, the other for the maintenance and upkeep of schools and other needs. These funds were managed by the State Development Office. When the *wakil rakyat* recommended a particular project, the Development Office would usually approve an allocation for the project, which would then be forwarded to the public works department, which would carry out the project or contract it out to the private sector. It is noteworthy that such funds were *not* made available to elected *wakil rakyat* belonging to the opposition parties. Consequently, although the opposition *wakil rakyat* might recommend a particular project, it was likely to be rejected unless the circumstances were compelling.

Chia was elected to office for the first time in the April 1995 elections. His constituency Bukit Bendera had previously been held by the opposition DAP for some seventeen years. Having been Koh's special assistant in Tanjong Bungah, and responsible, among others, for running Koh's service center prior to 1995, Chia swung into service center work immediately after his election.

During April to December 1995, several disasters occurred in parts of his constituency. Following heavy rains and landslides resulting in some major roads being closed, he was at hand to assess the damage. He arranged for remedial activities to be undertaken by the relevant authorities. With Lye, the Air Itam assemblyman, Chia set up a special relief team to look into the welfare needs of the residents of Penang Hill who were

left stranded when the hill railway service was discontinued temporarily; he arranged for relief aid to the residents. When a fire broke out in another part of his constituency, he was also at hand to arrange for relief, including temporary housing.

Assisting in disasters aside, Koh, Teng, and Chia jointly organized an identity card registration exercise in their constituencies, set up mini-libraries in villages, and launched a campaign to promote reading among schoolchildren. Chia personally arranged for additional street lighting to be installed in parts of his constituency after conducting a survey of the problem. He made available funds from his CDF allocation for minor public works projects like retarring secondary roads and repairing drains. Several clean-up projects were also organized with the cooperation of Koh and Teng, local residents, task force volunteers, and the relevant authorities. There were also numerous social (visiting markets), cultural (the Hungry Ghost, Lantern, Hari Raya, and Chinese New Year festivals), and sports (a soccer competition) functions to attend: to deliver a speech, to give away the prizes, to "open" events, and so on. It appeared that the four representatives took turns serving as guest-of-honor at these functions.

In early 1996, Chia received numerous requests from the public for a share of his CDF allocation. The residents of his constituency had perhaps been awakened to the fact that such funds were available; before Chia's election, the opposition MP had always been denied such funds. After studying these requests in coordination with the other *wakil rakyat*, he made recommendations to the relevant authorities. The usual minor public works projects included retarring secondary roads, repairing drains and bridges, and the like. Chia also recommended that funds be made available to neighborhood and residents' associations, religious organizations, youth and sports clubs, and welfare organizations in his constituency, for everything from tables and chairs to musical instruments. Sometimes he arranged awards for public works projects, such as the RM15,000 he had allocated to an Indian temple threatened by landslide. Perhaps to enhance good relations with the press, he also donated a fax and printer to the Penang Press Club.

Chia also used his CDF funds to provide relief to individual constituents who faced emergencies. When the homes of five families were destroyed after a tree collapsed, Chia organized relief. So too when a rockslide damaged some thirteen houses in another village. When fire broke out, killing a resident in yet another village, he visited the victim's family and arranged a financial contribution to the wife. So too did Lye. Chia also intervened in negotiations between a property developer and thirty-three households that had broken down due to disputes over the com-

pensation to be provided to those being resettled. On this occasion he acted on behalf of Koh as well, whose standing as chief minister probably helped to effect a solution.

His visits to markets, sometimes with Koh, other times with Teng, were regularized. Almost automatically, one, two, or all of them would be present at the major social and cultural activities occurring in his constituency. But they themselves also organized various sociocultural activities: blood drives, newspaper and library subscriptions for schools, antidrug exhibitions and presentations, a coloring contest for schoolchildren, tours by constituency groups to Manjung District, Perak, to learn "beautification and environmental programs," and so on. In December Chia personally led a forty-person group of their service teams and task force volunteers on a visit to the Malaysian and Singapore parliaments.

An innovation in 1996 was the *majlis dialog* (dialogue council). Several were conducted in the people's halls (*Balai Rakyat*) in Bukit Bendera constituency. Problems addressed included housing, parking and traffic woes, difficulties in business licensing, shortfalls in the provision of sanitation, garbage collection, water-supply, electricity and health services, gangsterism and drug addiction among youth, and so on. Depending on where the function was held, the respective state assemblyman would also be present with Chia. More important, perhaps, representatives of the relevant authorities accompanied the *wakil rakyat* to these dialogues. That year, Chia was especially proud that Koh, Teng, and he had succeeded in persuading the higher authorities (both federal and state) to provide additional funds to widen and upgrade a major thoroughfare running through their constituencies. Koh's standing as chief minister surely helped their application. These additional financial allocations were announced to those attending these dialogue sessions and publicized in Chia's and Koh's bulletins.

The following year, 1997, opened with a little bang when some three thousand people jointly celebrated the *Gongxi-Raya* double celebration that was held in the Tg Bungah community hall. The function was jointly organized with Koh as the guest-of-honor. On that occasion Koh announced the good news that the BN government had increased the CDF allocation for MPs from RM300,000 to RM500,000. Subsequently, Chia declared in his bulletin that he had adopted the slogan "your problems, our concern" and so invited his constituents to submit their requests for a share of his funds early.

Following this Chia recommended the usual disbursement of CDF funds for minor public works projects. Various organizations, as in previous years, were awarded funds for their everyday private needs. Schools in

the constituency also benefited. There were RM13,000 to tar a side road leading to a school; RM5,000 for a chain-link fence; RM12,500 to build a railing along a monsoon drain; RM5,000 to replace broken tables and chairs; RM13,000 for general school improvements; RM3,600 for a computer; RM3,500 to upgrade a teachers' room; and so on. In each case, some ceremony was conducted when the funds were made available. Naturally, these ceremonies got Chia into the news and gained him political mileage.

The usual relief for disaster victims was provided. In one case, the owner of a house damaged by a falling coconut tree was presented with a check. In another case, Chia and Lye donated repair funds to the victims of a landslide. The usual *gotong royong* projects were conducted, again in coordination with Koh's and Teng's teams. A well-publicized project was the cleaning up of "Moon Gate," the departure-point for hiking up Penang Hill. On this occasion, volunteers from various organizations helped the task force team and the relevant authorities. Another well-publicized project was the cleaning up of a Chinese cemetery with the voluntary assistance of nearby residents.

Again, all four *wakil rakyat* attended numerous social, cultural, and sports events in their constituencies. This included celebrations of the various festivals, a *Malam Muhibbah*, the *Malam Tanjong Bungah*, a "Hill Run" for the spirited, a "Joy Walk" for the less spirited, cooking demonstrations, and so on. There was also an evening function to promote respect for senior citizens among the youths.

In mid-1997, Chia, Koh, and Teng launched a tree-planting campaign, which was followed by a "Cleanliness and Beautification" effort in the Kebun Bunga and Tanjong Bungah state constituencies. These campaigns were conducted with the cooperation of the MPPP and the Jaycees branches in the two constituencies. On another occasion Chia officiated as judge in a statewide fishing competition that attracted six hundred contestants. Koh also showed up and presented prizes to the winners. With the threat of an outbreak of coxsackie infection, pamphlets outlining preventive measures were distributed in markets and residential areas. This was followed up by a talk by health officers in the Komtar, again organized under Teng's auspices.

The year 1997 also marked the tenth anniversary of the establishment of a free clinic in a village. Since 1987, Teng, a medical doctor, had provided free medical services several times a month to the needy in this village located in his Kebun Bunga constituency. With the cooperation of volunteers, Koh, Teng, and Chia organized free treatment by Chinese-trained physicians for the needy in two other areas in the Bukit Bendera parliamentary constituency.

Finally, through the intervention of Chief Minister Koh, Bukit Bendera benefited through the construction of a new water filtration plant in Batu Feringghi, two major road widening projects, and the upgrading of the Hill Railway station, all funded by the federal or state governments with the cooperation of the MPPP. The *wakil rakyat* did not fail to highlight these projects in their bulletins and in their dialogue sessions with the public.

When interviewed by the press after one of these dialogue sessions, Chia stated he was proud to look into petty problems like drains and roads. But he insisted that he is also involved in intellectual debates at parliamentary sessions and party meetings. In fact, he prides himself as an environmentalist, having been secretary of the Malayan Nature Society (Penang branch) previously, then helping to establish the Friends of Penang Botanic Gardens, which he currently heads.

## The Politics of Public Works and Services

I have discussed at some length the everyday role of the *wakil rakyat* representatives and the service centers. No doubt, the case of the parliamentary constituency of Bukit Bendera is somewhat extraordinary: one of its three state assemblyman is the chief minister while a second is the president of the MPPP. As chief executives of the state government and municipal council Koh and Teng have been able to provide their constituents with more than their fair share of political goods—public works and services, and funds for private projects of particular associations and groups. Almost inevitably, complaints made by their constituents receive more attention than most representatives would provide. Nonetheless, Chia's sustained dedication to his constituency work is significant. Most *wakil rakyat* representatives would not have undertaken even half of his initiatives. In this sense the efforts of Chia in Bukit Bendera come close to an "ideal type."

Be that the case, there is evidence that the role of the *wakil rakyat* as outlined above is gaining ground in other parts of the country too. The information contained in the *New Straits Times* series *My Wakil Rakyat and I* (which appeared every Sunday and Monday for several years) is testimony to this new norm adopted by the Barisan politicians. Media reports regularly illustrate the changing role of the Barisan representatives and their parties. Below is an incomplete list of development projects and services conducted by non-Malay BN politicians and their parties in various parts of peninsular Malaysia as reported in a single newspaper, the *Sin Chew Jit Poh*, during the month of May 1998.

- The Penang MCA state legislative assemblyman (SLA) for Air Itam donated RM10,000 toward the repainting of a Buddhist temple and another RM5,000 toward the organization of a celebration in conjunction with Hari Wesak (May 13).
- A Pahang SLA and a group of local MCA leaders visited the site of a bus accident that had resulted in several casualties (May 14).
- The SLA for Sungai Puyu was the guest-of-honor at a dinner organized by residents to collect funds to purchase a piece of land on which to build a Chinese temple. The SLA promised to help financially. Elsewhere, another MCA SLA donated funds to retar a road (May 15).
- Five housewives sought the help of the MCA Public Services and Complaints Bureau (PSCB) after they had been issued bankruptcy notices. Apparently, their husbands had used their names without their permission to launch various businesses (May 15).
- The Kuala Kedah MCA SLA donated RM7,000 in addition to an earlier RM3,000 to a voluntary firefighting squad in Kuala Kedah to set up an office and to purchase equipment (May 17).
- The Penang MCA leader and the Penang MCA Youths launched a week-long campaign to encourage the people to "Buy Malaysian Products" (May 18).
- After a visit to a corner of his constituency, the Gerakan SLA for Pengkalan Kota, Penang, promised to donate funds to retar a road, clean the drains, and repair street lights there. He also criticized a developer who had dumped his building materials on the public road, which had resulted in traffic jams besides endangering road users. Meanwhile, the Penang Gerakan Service Center contacted another developer for clarification after receiving a complaint that the developer had hiked up the purchase price of a flat to RM119,900. The advertised price was RM20,000 less (May 19).
- The MCA Bukit Gelugor SLA announced that his service center would soon be able to provide counseling services. A team of twenty counselors would be available to provide counseling on family, spouses, parenting, and even sexuality-related problems (May 19).
- The Sungai Bakap SLA arranged a meeting between Telecoms and local residents, some of whom had complained that they had received bills that were unduly high (May 22).
- The MCA Member of Parliament (MP) for Bukit Mertajam led an MCA delegation to visit the victims of a fire disaster that had destroyed thirty-six homes. He announced that each family would receive RM5,000 from the Welfare Department and another RM500 from the Governor's Emergency Relief fund. He called upon the authorities to provide a fire engine to the voluntary firefighting squad so that future disasters could be avoided. Meanwhile, his colleagues in the Penang MCA PSCB lodged a complaint on behalf of a woman who had reported the loss of her identity card some five years ago but had still been unable to acquire a replacement. The Penang MCA PSCB also looked into another case involving a student who had obtained

excellent results in the qualifying exams for university placement and yet was not offered a place in any of the local state universities (May 22).

- Michael Chong, MCA PSCB chief, asked Telecoms to prove that a businessman actually accumulated a RM30,00 telephone bill. He declared that Telecoms' threat to declare the businessman bankrupt if he did not settle the bill within a month was "uncalled for." The businessman had sought the MCA's help (May 25).
- Thirteen people complained to Michael Chong that a woman had cheated them of RM45,000. He warned the woman to return the money within a week, failing which a police report would be lodged (May 26).
- Michael Chong announced that a fifteen-year-old girl whose parents had lodged a "missing persons" complaint had been found. Apparently, a twenty-eight-year-old man, whom the police was now looking for, had forced her into prostitution. Four other missing women had also been found and reunited with their families (May 27).
- The Johore MCA secretary called on the inspector-general of police and the Johore chief police officer to look into the case of a youth who had been detained by the police after he had lodged a complaint against a taxi driver who had allegedly beaten him. The police were also asked to look into the case of a young woman who was being harassed by her stepfather. The latter was released from jail after serving a ten-year sentence for raping his stepdaughter (May 28).
- An illiterate woman complained that she had received a letter that she sent but had incorrectly addressed. However, the money order contained inside was missing. A report was filed with postal authorities several months ago but to no avail. The MCA PSCB promised to contact the authorities over the matter. Meanwhile, the Selangor Gerakan Service Bureau promised to investigate the case of three missing boys after their parents brought the matter to its attention (May 30).
- The Gerakan SLA for Sungai Pinang announced that he had been able to secure RM17,000 for a school located in his constituency (May 31).

The provision of public works and services by politicians to their supporters and electorate is not a new phenomenon. Studies of local-level politics have noted politicians and parties in Malaysia playing similar roles during the 1960s and 1970s (Nyce 1973; Vasil 1971; Husin 1975; Kessler 1978; Strauch 1981; Loh 1982, 1988; Shamsul 1986). Observers of Filipino politics in the pre-Marcos era noted that Filipino politicians acted as patrons to their supporters. The range of services and "goods" offered was even more wide-ranging than that delivered by Chia et al. However, such clientelist ties began to break down as the market economy penetrated down to the local level and as face-to-face relations were interrupted by long absences of the patrons from their *haciendas* (Wurfel 1989, 33–36,

94–98). Chan (1976, 106–156) has indicated that PAP politicians and party branches in Singapore also performed many of the services and activities like Chia et al., especially in the early 1960s. However, these were reduced to two "staple activities" by the late 1960s: the weekly "Meet-the-People Sessions" (when complaints and problems would be aired) and the running of kindergarten classes. With the consolidation and extension of the modern state to the local level, many of the other services were assumed by the newly created government bodies, specifically, the Citizens Consultative Committees and the Community Centers.

Alternatively, the failure of government to deliver public works and services has usually provided the space for charitable and voluntary organizations, sometimes affiliated with religious bodies, to pick up the slack. In some neighboring countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines, NGOs have taken over the task of providing potable water, rural electrification, agricultural extension and health services, schools and day-care centers, and so on. Funds are even acquired from foreign donor organizations, including the World Bank, for these ends. In fact, some of these NGOs, the so-called transformative types, are also involved in empowering those to whom they provide these services through "conscientization" or political education and mobilization activities (Loh 1996). However, these Barisan *wakil rakyat* and their service centers, like the charitable and voluntary organizations, are not involved in the latter activities. Indeed, it appears that Malaysian political parties nowadays shy away from most political issues. Many of the NGOs in Malaysia are in fact more "political" than the parties themselves. More than that, politics has come to mean the delivery of development goods and services. The BN parties have institutionalized this relationship even as the consolidation and extension of the modern state into local areas occur.

The contrast is not only with the norm elsewhere in the region. The contrast is also with Malaysia's own past. For the political parties in Malaysia were extremely "political"—raising political consciousness, mobilizing, and empowering—especially during the struggle for independence in the late 1940s and 1950s (Ratnam 1965; Vasil 1971; Loh 1988). Even in the 1960s, when the political parties unavoidably were enmeshed in ethnic issues, public debates, political education, and mobilization continued to be part and parcel of the political parties' domain. This was so for Malay and non-Malay parties, and for opposition as well as government parties. Such heightened levels of participation and mobilization were subsequently blamed for the communal violence that occurred in Kuala Lumpur in May 1969. Ostensibly to reduce ethnic polarization, civil liberties were curbed and the space for political maneu-

vering reduced in the early 1970s, before parliamentary democracy, suspended for almost two years, was restored. Further curbs were then introduced in the 1980s.

Today, a long litany of coercive laws is in place. In this regard, local elections, suspended temporarily in the mid-1960s, were formally abolished with the promulgation of the new Local Government Act 1976. In line with these changes, BN parties withdrew almost completely from activities that led to conscientization of the people. Opposition parties that continued these activities were harassed and their leaders periodically detained. In the absence of these political activities, it appears that the ordinary people have been reoriented toward developmental concerns. The involvement of the *wakil rakyat* in public services and the institutionalization of service centers as a key element in party machinery signals, therefore, a sea change in the role of the BN political parties and politicians at the local level. The following discussion of the activities of two BN parties beyond the local level suggests a similar conclusion.

## Beyond the Local Level

Gomez and Jomo (1997) have argued persuasively that the BN parties in Malaysia are, nowadays, deeply involved in business activities. This fact is indisputable and requires no elaboration here. The observations by Gomez and Jomo (1997) and others that the Barisan parties have been able to acquire control of the mass media, to develop extensive party machines, to accumulate "war chests" to fight elections, and to further the long-term interests of parties or leaders are similarly noteworthy. Taking off from those studies, I wish to discuss how, via access to party funds or government resources, the BN parties have been able to provide a further set of development goods and services to party members and supporters beyond those at the local level.

### *The MCA*

The Malaysian Chinese Association's (MCA) educational projects are now well-known. These include the Tunku Abdul Rahman College (KTAR, set up in Kuala Lumpur in 1969) and its four branches (in Johor, Perak, Pahang, and Penang, launched in the 1990s). KTAR offers higher educational opportunities at much lower costs than other private colleges. More than 60,000 students have been graduated while its current enrollment in the five branches totals almost 18,000. Its Jayadiri Institute of Technology

further offers technical and vocational training. Both institutions are open to all qualified Malaysians, but they cater to Chinese youths in particular. Various campaigns to raise funds for these two institutions, the independent Chinese secondary schools, and government Chinese primary schools have also been undertaken.

One result of this activity has been the MCA's donation of RM2.3 million to 114 "smart schools," one in each constituency with a MCA *wakil rakyat*. Each school has been provided with a RM20,000 grant. Further arrangements were made with a consortium of corporations to donate an additional RM20,000 to each school and with the Parents Teachers Associations to raise another RM20,000. With RM60,000 in hand, the schools will then set up state-of-the-art computer laboratories (*The Star,* January 14, 1999). Under the auspices of the "Langkawi Project" launched in 1993, the party has also contributed toward the improvement of educational opportunities in rural areas, especially in the former new villages. In 1999 the MCA's Huaren Education Foundation allocated RM745,000 to purchase "accessories" for almost 19,000 children from poor families involved in the Langkawi Project (*The Star,* January 11, 1999). Time and again, the MCA president has reiterated that his party would continue "to focus most of its time and energy on education for the benefit of the Chinese community" (*The Star,* July 7, 1998).

There is also an ongoing effort, first launched in the early 1980s, to pool the financial resources of Chinese associations and individuals by setting up "deposit-taking cooperatives" (DTCs) so as to promote the participation of ordinary Chinese in the corporate sector of the economy. After a set-back in the mid-1980s, when several DTCs were taken over by the central bank as a result of mismanagement and losses, these cooperatives are now succeeding in their business endeavors (at least before the economic meltdown of 1997–1999). Participation in one of these cooperatives enables the depositor to save and borrow money from the Kojadi higher education loan scheme. Formed in 1981, Kojadi has over 64,000 members and has given out more than RM86 million in study loans (*The Star,* June 28, 1998).

A Malaysian Chinese Cultural Society, which sponsors and promotes cultural performances, competitions, training, and exhibitions in the (so-called) Chinese arts, was also established through the MCA's initiative. Together with the Chinese guilds, the MCCS has also sponsored a special effort "to preserve the Chinese heritage in Malaysia" by encouraging the collection of documents, publications, and other cultural artifacts, as well as setting up mini-libraries, archives, and museums to house these items.

Apart from the service centers run by its *wakil rakyat* at the constituency level, the MCA also runs a Public Service and Complaints Bureau headed by Michael Chong, whose bureau's work is given much publicity in the local press. This bureau has branches in most of the states. Its range of activities have included assisting home-buyers abandoned by developers; helping abandoned children and victims of domestic abuse; searching for missing persons; looking into cases of lost passports and other documents or overcharging of consumers by utility companies; and so on. Due to its regular campaigns on behalf of the sick in need of funds for surgery and treatment, the bureau set up a special Medical Aid Fund that collects donations and distributes them on an ongoing basis.

Following its 49th general assembly in Penang (*The Star,* March 9, 1998) the party also launched its "Love Malaysia, Buy Malaysia" campaign as a way to help the country overcome the effects of the Asian economic crisis. Large rallies, concerts, trade fairs, and exhibitions have been organized in small towns and cities toward this end. A follow-up to this effort was the setting up in late 1998 of a National Small and Medium-Scale Industry Consultative Center, which the MCA coordinates with the support of the Federation of Chinese Associations Malaysia, the Association of Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry Malaysia, and the SMI Association Malaysia (*The Star,* July 12, 1999). By facilitating contact, information exchange, and the organization of seminars, the center has promoted cooperation within the otherwise fragmented and neglected small- and medium-industries (SMIs) manufacturing sector. This effort has also been well received by the public.

### *The Gerakan*

Unlike the MCA, the Gerakan is not in control of any holding company although some of its leaders are. Unlike them, it has not set up any educational institution. It merely boasts a Gerakan Higher Education Loan Fund launched with RM5 million in 1996, available to those who have been members of the party for at least five years, for their children's education. However, through its preeminent role in the Penang state government and the Penang Island Municipal Council, it has been able to access government funds to provide big and small development projects and to improve the quality of services to supporters. Some Gerakan leaders are also involved in making decisions on privatization projects, service contracts, building projects, business licenses, and so on, so they are in the enviable position of being able to award these to particular companies or individuals, including those associated with the party. Even if these decisions were

made fairly, kudos and gratitude would still accrue to the Gerakan decision makers. In this regard the MCA and the MIC leaders are also in a position to perform such distributive tasks and accrue similar support.

To celebrate its thirtieth anniversary, the Gerakan adopted a new slogan, "One Heart, One Nation, One Vision," which is in line with its desire to promote a greater sense of multiethnic community among Malaysians. In conjunction with this, in 1998 they organized the following activities:

- seminars and dialogues on the economy, education, and the environment
- counseling programs on education and careers for youth
- programs for women on parenting, baby care, and handling social problems
- community service projects and *gotong royong* activities to improve the quality of the environment
- fund-raising activities to assist charitable organizations and NGOs, especially those facing financial constraints during the Asian economic crisis

The list of seminars and dialogues included: "Local Opportunities in Tertiary Education"; "Manufacturing Industry—the Engine for Economic Recovery"; "How to Prevent Kidney Failure"; "Rural Poverty"; and "Hawking in the 21st Century." It is significant that only one of these planned events was of an overtly political nature. This was the seminar, "The Role of Trade Unionism in Local Government." It turned out to be badly organized and poorly attended.

### *UMNO*

Finally, a short comment on UMNO. UMNO represents the extreme case of how, through control of government and as a result of NEP benefits made available to *bumiputera,* patronage has become widespread (Gomez and Jomo 1997; Mehmet 1988; Shamsul 1986; Crouch 1996). Precisely because of this, popular support and legitimacy for UMNO have been forthcoming. This holds true even when there is discrimination in favor of certain *bumiputera*. Popular support would decline if the distribution of goods and services was limited to a handful of *bumiputera,* but this is not the case.

## Conclusion

The common wisdom on political parties is that they perform five discernible functions. They

- identify and articulate social and political problems faced by the people
- aggregate these problems and interests and set priorities in the form of policy preferences
- mobilize members and the people to support party platforms and policy preferences, especially in elections
- recruit and train future leaders as well as potential candidates for elections
- transform themselves from organizations representing particular interests to parties-in-government addressing the concerns of all sections of the population once in power

Despite the numerous activities conducted by the *wakil rakyat* representative in his constituency, nowadays he seldom articulates the social and political problems of the people. His primary role is to address development needs. Nor are *wakil rakyat* or, even less, ordinary party members involved in policy deliberations. Party leaders instead restrict the scope of party debates and attempt to mollify criticism by emphasizing the importance of development projects. Finally, activities geared toward the political education, conscientization, and mobilization of members and supporters are hardly ever organized. Instead, the non-Malay BN parties are essentially concerned with delivering development, namely public works and services, to the non-Malays. By so doing, the parties hope to ensure electoral success and maintenance of the status quo.

Indeed, the BN parties only come into their own as political parties during general elections, when a myriad of political activities need to be conducted in a short time. Even then, the message conveyed does not wander far from the theme of development and services. As a result, considerable numbers of non-Malays, especially those who have benefited from the projects and services rendered, vote for the Barisan political parties. It is also true, of course, that general elections are conducted unfairly in Malaysia. The Barisan parties are able to utilize government facilities and the mass media for their campaigns, and have access to bigger electoral machines and war chests. There are also allegations of gerrymandering, of "phantom voters" getting into the register of voters, and of a biased Elections Commission.

Of course, there has also been much controversy about rising "money politics" and cronyism, controls on the mass media, the lack of transparency in decision making, the loss of judicial integrity, and erosion of the rule of law. Yet it does not appear that these unfair electoral arrangements have undermined the faith of many non-Malay voters in the BN parties. In fact, like the non-Malay BN leaders, much of the non-Malay public appears to have turned away from "old-fashioned" controversial issues like justice, transparency, accountability, and democracy itself.

In the study above I have argued that the BN parties have been responsible for imbuing Malaysian society, especially non-Malays, with a new culture of politics devoid of popular participation and of public debate over important issues. Instead, the new culture promotes a politics of developmentalism, emphasizing the delivery of goods and services, economic development, and a state governed by the status quo BN.

No doubt, developmentalism has helped to ease ethnic tensions. But developmentalism, I suggest, also poses limits to the current attempt to promote the counter-discourse of democracy, especially among non-Malays. For many non-Malays, the current modus operandi, wherein they have access to public works and services via association with the MCA and Gerakan, is a major improvement over previous neglect and perceived discrimination by the BN government during the NEP years. Since the terms of governance are predicated on Malay political and cultural preeminence, the status quo is viewed as a favorable arrangement. The results of the November 1999 general elections indicate that the non-Malays rallied behind the BN in even more spectacular fashion than in the 1995 elections. Although wooed by the opposition Barisan Alternatif parties to build a more democratic Malaysia, the majority of non-Malays were unprepared to give up the Barisan Nasional and its discourse of developmentalism.

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# 8

# The Redefinition of Politics and the Transformation of Malaysian Pluralism

*Shamsul A.B.*

The economic and political crisis that hit Malaysia in July–August 1997 has laid bare old social fault lines and revealed new ones in a Malaysian pluralism rooted in the colonial era's "plural society" framework. The temptation to view this crisis and the events since then in a convenient but too narrowly contemporary sense is great. In fact, in both the voluminous popular and pseudo-academic literature available to date, this has been the trend. Although these contributions are useful for shedding light on the possible causes that led to the crisis as well as the anatomy of its consequences, they are analytically limited in at least five ways.

First, they are largely blow-by-blow accounts of the events, bordering on sensationalism and lacking the broader framework. Second, the accounts have only offered "popular" analysis in the sense that they are audience-oriented. The emphasis has been largely on fulfilling the audience's raw need for information. As such, it is not surprising that these accounts exhibit a tendency to be partisan, either pro- or anti-government. Third, there seems to be an absence of serious analytical assessment, meaning an analysis that is subject matter-oriented and grounded in an historical-structural perspective informed by theoretical concerns. Fourth, because the accounts are not grounded and rarely contextualized in a serious longitudinal perspective, the Anwar–Mahathir conflict, for instance, has been viewed by some local and foreign popular analysts as something spectacular and unprecedented in Malaysian

politics. This conflict is certainly the latest but not the first in domestic politics, which included previously the murder of a veteran Malay politician by a cabinet minister (Shamsul 1988; Khoo Boo Teik 2000). In a sense, therefore, there seems to be either a misrepresentation of history or ignorance on the part of many analysts. Fifth, there is a tendency to view the Anwar–Mahathir conflict simply as another "Malay issue." This is not surprising because analysts are trapped in a cul-de-sac within the old analytic frameworks of ethnicity and class dominant in Malaysian studies and informed by the earlier plural society framework (Shamsul 1998b).

This essay is a modest attempt to redress some of the analytical problems mentioned above. More than that, it is an effort to understand the making of the "new politics" in Malaysia and Malaysian pluralism through an examination of the Anwar–Mahathir conflict in a broader, longitudinal perspective. Toward these ends, I begin the discussion, first, by touching on some of the theoretical concerns informing the present analysis, which must be situated relative to arguments in Malaysian studies. My main argument in this essay is that contemporary Malaysian political culture is informed not only by colonially generated knowledge and ethnoreligious concerns but more and more by pluralistic and universal idioms and concerns. This is so because Malaysian society is not made up of uniform ethnoreligious entities but of diverse ones capable of highly divergent trajectories and developments. Therefore, despite strong state intervention, the state-elite does not have a monopoly over power and political space; nor is material-market interest the only motivating factor in Malaysia's contemporary realpolitik. State-initiated programs have resulted in many unintended consequences, leading to, among other things, an unexpected reflowering of pluralism.

Second, having provided this background, I then describe the nature of popular interpretations of the conflict to date, showing how the various sectors and fragments of society find the energy and opportunity to have their opinions heard and implemented. Third, I outline the nature of Malaysia's "modernization project" within which the present conflict must be located and understood, especially as regards the rise of the Malay middle class. Finally, I venture into explaining the origins of the new politics. I argue that the new politics has emerged with increased state intervention, albeit unintentionally, through the state's planned change and social engineering in line with its modernization project and, especially, its New Economic Policy (NEP, 1971–1990 and National Development Plan (NDP, 1991–2000).

## Arguments on Malaysian Pluralism

Among both academics and popular observers, the colonially constructed plural society view of Malaysia, with its pronounced emphasis on ethnoreligious divisions, is something taken for granted and rarely problematized (Shamsul 1996b; Nair 1999; Smith 1999). This plural society pattern was the result of successful British manipulation and exploitation of these divisions for its own colonial ends, conducted through its policies of "divide-and-conquer" and indirect rule, not unlike those the British used in East Africa (Mamdani 1996) and India (Cohn 1996). This manipulation was made possible not only by Britain's territorial conquest but, more important, by its conquering of what we might call the "epistemological space" of Malaya's inhabitants (Shamsul 1998a, 2–5). The British explored and conquered this epistemological space by applying various investigative modalities in the service of officializing procedures. The most critical in the whole exercise was the acquisition of a high level of proficiency in local languages. This enabled colonial officials to issue commands, collect taxes, maintain law and order, and create other forms of knowledge about the people they were ruling, all in an effort to categorize, bound, and control the vast social world that was Malaya. The implementation of colonial policies like the taking of censuses (first begun in 1871), the vernacular educational policy, and the Malay Reservation Enactment of 1913 transformed the colonially constructed ethnoreligious classifications into a naturalized set of official categories and popular idioms. From this perspective, it can be convincingly argued that the official, popular, and academic understanding of Malaysian pluralism today is largely informed by this colonial knowledge (Shamsul 1998b).

However, we must not neglect the role of the "cross-cultural knowledge" of the HRAF (Human Relations Area File) kind, originating from the United States, that later became influential in the understanding of Malaysian pluralism (Shamsul 1998b, 1999). This began with the advent of American global hegemony in the postwar and Cold War era, especially after the Bretton Woods Agreement of 1944, which led to birth of the World Bank and the IMF (International Monetary Fund; McMichael 1996). This was the type of knowledge that informed the grand evolutionary "modernization project" that the United States promoted in the decolonized states of the so-called Third World, often in the form of policy studies and development administration.

Malaysia became a target of the modernization project sponsored by the United States within the Bretton Woods framework. Since 1950, concepts, classifications, categories, theories, and approaches related to the

modernization project have entered the epistemological space through which Malaysia is understood. Terms such as *development, development projects, economic growth, equal distribution, entrepreneurship, social justice, modernity, tradition, stages of growth, rural development, Green Revolution,* and many more have become part and parcel of the top-down planned change and officializing procedures affecting the lives of all Malaysians. In this manner, Malay terms such as *projek pembangunan* (lit., "development projects"), *projek kerajaan* (lit., "government projects"), or simply *projek,* became household words (Shamsul 1977, 1986). The study of a Malay village in Selangor by Peter Wilson (1967), for instance, conducted in the framework of the HRAF's scientific anthropology of "cross-cultural knowledge," is significant in this regard for two reasons. First, it demonstrated in detail the depth of the influence of colonially constructed knowledge not only in the way Wilson framed his research and analysis but also in the manner in which the villagers that he studied perceived themselves. Second, the study also documented how the idioms of the modernization project were naturalized and exploited by the postcolonial state, idioms then presented in a comparative "checklist" developed by the HRAF program. These examples show that the British were responsible for introducing the building blocks through which Malaysian pluralism was understood and manipulated. But it was the Americans who further pluralized these formulas, introducing the modernization project informed by a cross-cultural knowledge paradigm.

Against such a background, then, it is not surprising that the discourse on Malaysian pluralism developed before and just after the Second World War continued to be used later in the postcolonial period, including in very recent discussions on Malaysian developmentalism (see Loh Kok Wah in this volume and 1999). This pluralist discourse subsequently gave rise to what became known as, respectively, the ethnic and class paradigms in Malaysian studies. The ethnic paradigm was promoted not only by the colonial government, but also by that portion of the anti-colonial movement organized around and motivated by "ethnic" nationalism. Simultaneously, the class paradigm became the basis of the dissenting tradition of a section of the anti-colonial movement, namely, by the Malayan Communist Party (MCP). Each of the paradigms began as a form of public advocacy and eventually expanded and entered the realm of academic analyses. Ultimately this discourse took hold in institutions of higher learning in Malaya (Shamsul 1998b, 41–46).

In the postcolonial period, Malaysians have had to come to terms with nation-building. Public discourse has been dominated by issues such as the question of national language, national education, national culture,

national integration, and national identity. Under the influence of these concerns, the discourse on Malaysian pluralism gradually shifted from that of ethnicity and class to culture and identity paradigms. Again, however, these paradigms made their first public appearances as forms of advocacy, and only subsequently moved into the academic sphere. If the culture paradigm was dominated by ideas and concepts associated with ethnic nationalism, the identity paradigm was informed by concepts drawn from both ethnic *and* civic nationalism.

As these examples show, there has been a tendency to ethnicize Malaysian pluralism, using knowledge to advance narrowly chauvinistic causes (Shamsul 1996b, 588–592). The part of the identity paradigm that might have highlighted interest-oriented issues, such as consumerism, environmentalism, and gender and led to a critique of colonial and modernization knowledge, was explored only after addressing what was considered more essential: issues of ethnicity and class. There has even been a close relationship between the advancement of ethnic nationalism and entrepreneurship, articulated strongly within state-supported projects of nation-building and market growth. The formulation and implementation of the NEP represents the single most important demonstration of this close relationship (Shamsul 1997; Khoo Boo Teik 2000). However, at the margins of Malaysian studies, there were other paradigms and other concerns. The pursuit of social justice through a fair distribution of resources, freedom of expression, protection of human rights and democracy, and the formation of a sustainable civil society were more commonly addressed by way of a paradigm emphasizing civic nationalism concerns.

Admittedly, it has been an uphill struggle for the postcolonial Malaysian state to keep a balance between the pull of entrepreneurship and the push for social justice. This has been a regular source of tension, both within the ruling political coalition and between it and the opposition and society at large. Politics in these terms is identified with existing institutional arrangements, such as in the form of modern electoral system, the legislative, the judiciary, the executive, and the security armed forces. In this view, mainstream politics is communal-consensual in nature and often labeled, in Lijphart's term, as "consociational" politics (Crouch 1996; Case 1996). However, there are also organizations in Malaysia, typically fragmented and surviving at the periphery, that have been pushing hard for interest-oriented concerns that are clearly beyond ethnicity and class interests (Lim Teck Ghee 1995; Saliha Hassan 1999).

The present essay analyzes the recent development of the interest-oriented social groups which, in the past few years, seem to have gathered sufficient momentum to find a niche at the center stage of Malaysian

politics. In so doing they are challenging the "old" mainstream politics. My interest is motivated by both empirical and conceptual-analytic concerns.

In empirical terms, I argue that the interest-oriented groups have redefined Malaysian politics in the sense that they seek legitimacy and power on the basis not of present institutional arrangements, but through a form of populism or mass politics motivated by the need to voice dissent and express resistance. Whether this "new politics," for want of a better term, is going to be translated into a successful political party or parties to challenge existing parties remains to be seen. Nonetheless, this new politics is something new in postwar Malaysian politics and society.

Expressed analytically, my essay examines an important shift in political culture that is taking place in contemporary Malaysia, although the evolution is far from finished or secure. The shift involves a move away from the colonial-inherited categories of race, ethnicity, and religion to, for want of a better term, "interest-based" concerns. This seems to be the main orientation of the new politics movement in Malaysia. This in turn suggests, I believe, that there is increased pluralization in the political sphere.

It is true nonetheless that the most obvious vehicle for articulating interests may still be ethnic-based organizations now motivated by the market or materially driven "developmentalism." Articulations like these have been vividly described in the present book by the Malaysian political scientist and social activist, Loh Kok Wah, as well as in his recent papers (1999). His analysis is based largely on data collected from his first but admirable attempt at an anthropological fieldwork in a parliamentary constituency. What he has described is not unlike that which has been captured in more richly textured anthropological accounts by Kessler (1978), Syed Husin Ali (1975), Rogers (1977), Strauch (1983), and Wong (1983) on patronage politics before and after the New Economic Policy. In other words, what Loh Kok Wah describes as developmentalism is 1990s-style patronage politics.

Implied in what Loh Kok Wah calls "developmentalism" is an assertion that there has been in Malaysia a movement away from ethnoreligious solidarities toward interest-based ones, but the trend is still a limited one because citizen participation is restricted to the marketplace while politics is reserved for entrenched elites. What is actually limited here, however, is Loh Kok Wah's analytical tools and conceptual imagination; these are still imprisoned by the colonial knowledge-generated ethnoreligious categories as well as modernization-developmentalist idioms. Contrary to his portrayal, the "interests" of the interest-based groups that have been pursued by non-governmental and similar groups in Malaysia are more varied than the narrow market, or "developmentalist" concerns he portrays.

Malaysian realpolitik is slowly moving away from the analytically hegemonic ethnic frame.

Ironically, Loh Kok Wah is currently one of the leaders of ALIRAN Kesedaran Negara, popularly referred to simply as ALIRAN, a political NGO launched on August 12, 1977. This social movement aims to raise social consciousness and upholds equality and democratic rights as well as racial and religious tolerance. The founding president of ALIRAN, Chandra Muzaffar, who has now left the organization, has graduated to become a full-fledged leader of a political party called Parti KeADILan Nasional (National Justice Party), established in April 1999. Besides ALIRAN, there are a number of other groups representing various interests, including those concerned for the environment, battered wives and children, Chinese-language schools, consumer interests, displaced estate and urban workers, Muslim women's rights, and the like.

There is indeed a long list of such interest-based activist groups in Malaysia, which are not merely motivated by crude market or materialistic interests. There exist groups for everything from economically disadvantaged hunter-and-gatherer communities in the depth of the Borneo forest to the opulent head-hunting corporate groups of postmodern Kuala Lumpur. Within each of these spheres NGOs and other forms of social groupings have emerged and are actively pursuing their own interests in a manner that demonstrates that not all that is happening in Malaysian society is state-contrived. Their emergence illustrates that societies are not uniform entities; different societal forms can coexist and not be governed simply by state elites or the market. In Malaysian political parlance, not everything that happens in Malaysia today is the result of top-down engineering.

This complexity is also evident in the division that has recently emerged within the newly formed, post-NEP Malay middle class. The division to which I refer is that between, on the one hand, the "new Malay" or Melayu Baru business group, representing materially oriented, corporate, "new rich" Malays, and, on the other, the religiously oriented ABIM (or the Malaysian Muslim Youth Movement). Both groups are urban-based (Shamsul 1999; Abul Rahman Embong 1999). In a similar manner, among the Chinese there is the powerful political party called the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), whose interests are largely material-*cum*-political. But there are also groups like the Dong Jiao Zhong (DJZ), a coalition of Chinese school-related organizations, active on a national level since 1951, whose primary interest is in providing political protections for Chinese language, education, and culture (Kua Kia Soong 1998, 1999). There are also multiethnic interest groups serving various

noble causes, ranging from the protection of the forest by the Sahabat Alam (Friends of the Earth) to the influential human rights organization known as SUARAM (Voice of the Malaysian People).

Perhaps it is worthwhile to mention here that one of SUARAM's major achievements was bringing together more than fifty Malaysian organizations—Islamists, socialists, liberals, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians, feminists, indigenous people, academics, unionists, and the disabled—in a series of meetings during 1993–1994 to formulate the Malaysian Human Rights Charter 1994. SUARAM, too, was instrumental in setting up a regionally based Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Human Rights mechanism. Remarkably, it did so without being hindered by state authorities in any of the ASEAN countries. Such has been the influence and the pursuit of the non-economic, non-market, but universalistic civil society groups in Malaysia. They are slowly reaping the fruits of their labors.

The lesson from all this is that the state-sponsored development and modernization programs, which have benefited not only Malays but also Chinese and Indians, have indeed brought deeply unintended consequences. This was amply demonstrated in the post-July 1997 events, when heightened Malay-Chinese market participation in the preceding decades has led some to call for greater civic and political participation articulated not in the colonial idioms of ethnicity and race but in the universal terms of civic rights and citizenship.

In what follows then, I examine the social origin of this new politics and its contemporary expressions. These phenomena have complicated Malaysian pluralism and what we need to understand it.

## Resisting Popular Interpretations

In September 1998, the world watched with amazement as unexpected events unfolded in Malaysia. The drama began on September 2 with the shocking news of the sudden removal of Anwar Ibrahim from his post as Malaysia's deputy prime minister by Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, the prime minister. If the world was shocked, Malaysians were confounded and confused. For the next seven weeks, Malaysia witnessed the most sustained opposition road show in modern Malaysian history. Led by the sacked minister Anwar Ibrahim, each of his gatherings attracted thousands of Malaysians from all ethnic groups and all walks of life. After Anwar was arrested on October 20, 1998, the world witnessed live on CNN and CNBC what had previously been unthinkable in Malaysian politics: six weeks of

public demonstrations in the streets of Kuala Lumpur, in open defiance of the authorities. Several of these demonstrations involved clashes with baton-wielding and water cannon-equipped Malaysian police, in uniform and in civilian clothes.

Attention soon moved to the Kuala Lumpur High Court, where the Anwar trial began on November 2, 1998. Interesting ironies were brilliantly apparent in this spectacular event. First, one should recall that the Mahathir government has pushed hard over the previous five years to promote IT (information technology) to prepare Malaysians for the "Information Age." The people responded well, but not, perhaps, in the way Mahathir had expected. The Internet component of the IT campaign became a powerful tool for thousands of Anwar's supporters to express their opposition and outrage. There were thirty different web sites available on the Internet, each detailing the Anwar–Mahathir conflict. Demonstrations that began in the street are now conducted in the "cyber corridor." Attempts to censor these sites have not been particularly successful.

A second irony is that the Malaysian authorities, including Anwar, have for "moral reasons" resisted for more than a decade now the introduction of "sex education" in schools. Ironically, the Anwar trial has become the best introduction ever to sex education for all Malaysians, young and old. Terms like *sodomy, homosexuality, anal sex, pubic hair, semen, bodily liquids, masturbation, sexual intercourse,* and *DNA,* came to be discussed in graphic legal and scientific detail in the court for weeks on end. All of this was duly reported and published, almost verbatim, in the local newspapers. The Malay language became enriched through the whole exercise. New Malay words had to be coined by the Malay mass media to describe what was once considered "unmentionable." There is now enough vocabulary and enough of an informed audience for someone to write a book on *Orang Melayu dan Seks* (The Malays and Sex); it will sell well.

Third, the Anwar trial was supposed to be a subdued and serious event. However, it has been turned into a kind of consumer culture celebration and fashion fest by some of the more illustrious female witnesses from the prosecution side. Their presence was not only covered in the mainstream press but also in the local entertainment and fashion magazines. In the local press, the photos of these well-groomed ladies graced the front pages of English- and Malay-medium newspapers. In magazines, the main focus of comment has been on the latest *kebaya* donned by the witnesses, their jewelry, shoes, and cosmetics.

The popular response to the whole dramatic episode has been to regard the trial as a "lose-lose" situation in which the "truth" will never

be revealed. The public seemed to hold the view that if Anwar wins in his court battle and proves that the charges against him are trumped up, then it is indeed a sad day for Malaysians. This would mean the country has a prime minister who indulges in "dirty and immoral" tactics for personal political gain. However, if Mahathir won in court and proved that Anwar is indeed an "immoral" person, then this means the whole country had been duped for three decades by Anwar, who has long thrived on his "clean and moral" image. But then again, as a lawyer friend remarked cynically to me recently, "Is the Malaysian judicial system capable of revealing 'the truth, the whole truth but nothing the truth'? Please help us, Allah!"

The popular accounts on the legal drama that have flooded the market thus far have taken a number of forms. At last count, there are at least fifty books and a dozen magazines, primarily in Malay, concerning the Anwar–Mahathir conflict. The majority clearly sided with Anwar. Those that sided with Mahathir have failed to attract or sustain a credible audience. The accounts and interpretations presented in the media and in other published forms as well as on the Internet were framed into two main styles. The first represents the day-by-day and blow-by-blow accounts of the Anwar road show: demonstrations, encounters with police, and court proceedings. This style is favored by the daily newspapers, those using the Internet, CNN news, international radio stations, and the hundreds of *surat layang* (flying or poison letters) of the cyber and ordinary type. Their style also reflects the nature of the medium, emphasizing as they do "currentness."

The second presents a broader perspective, focused less on the blow-by-blow accounts than on interpretations based on materials gathered from the dailies as well as from public interviews and other sources. International weekly magazines such as *Asiaweek*, *Time, Newsweek*, and the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, as well as many published books, have adopted this style, which reflects the taste of their perceived audience. They cover larger ground but still tend to lack depth. Among works in this genre, the best reporting has been provided by *Aliran Monthly*, whose contributors are mainly academics, and, in a book by Fan Yew Teng, *Anwar Saga: Malaysia on Trial* (1999). Fan Yew Teng is himself a famous activist.

The plot offered in the second genre is typically deceptively simple: (1) the conflict is presented as the result of differences in the way Mahathir and Anwar view the economic crisis and approaches each would take to resolve it; (2) Mahathir is said to have felt threatened by the possibility of being exposed by Anwar for corruption and cronyism since coming to power in 1981; (3) Mahathir was to be challenged by Anwar in the 1999 UMNO elections; (4) as a result of all these anxieties Mahathir supporters

launched a high-level conspiracy against Anwar; and, finally, (5) the way the Anwar trial has been conducted has cast doubt on the integrity of the Malaysian judiciary and lent support to the idea of high-level conspiracy.

These accounts and interpretations are popular in style; they are also highly partisan in approach. I am not making a moral judgment here that the styles are good or bad. I have seen both sides of the highly partisan accounts and interpretations. On the one side, some of the local newspapers, such as the *New Straits Times*, have been blatantly pro-Mahathir. On the other, many sources are pro-Anwar or simply anti-Mahathir.

In the present attempt at interpretation, I would like to cast the analytical net broader, deeper, and "longer" in a historical sense. I am not denying the gravity of the present conflict or saying that it is not unique and spectacular. In fact, it is sensational because of the "moral dimension" and the global attention it has attracted. Again, however, an informed observer of Malay and Malaysian politics would remember that there have been serious conflicts in the UMNO leadership almost every decade since the party's establishment in 1946. Since such high-level conflicts have occurred so regularly, it may not be right to apply the adjective *spectacular* to describe the current Anwar–Mahathir conflict.

There was, for example, the Dato' Onn Jaafar conflict with Tunku Abdul Rahman in the late 1940s over non-Malay membership in UMNO. In the aftermath of the 1969 ethnic riots, Tunku Abdul Rahman, the prime minister and UMNO president, had to hand over power to his deputy, Abdul Razak Hussein. In the mid-1970s, after Razak's sudden demise, UMNO again faced crises beginning with the Datuk Harun corruption case; the murder of a veteran UMNO politician by a UMNO cabinet minister; the UMNO–PAS conflict in 1977; and the subsequent declaration of Emergency in 1978 in the state of Kelantan. In the 1980s, we witnessed Tengku Razaleigh and Musa Hitam jockeying for the No. 2 post in UMNO, followed by the 1987 "Battle Royal" in UMNO and UMNO's subsequent deregistration as a political party in 1988. In the early 1990s we saw Anwar Ibrahim launch a successful challenge against Ghafar Baba, then deputy prime minister, for the post of UMNO deputy president; Anwar won hands down.

As a student of Malaysian politics and society, I would argue that each of these conflicts is unique and has to be understood not only within its contemporary context but also within the longer history of the increasing plurality of identity and nation in Malaysia. To my mind, the present Anwar–Mahathir conflict is "spectacular" only for the global attention it has received. Beyond media coverage of the event, we have to ask, what are the deeper social roots of these recurring high-level political conflicts

in UMNO? Is it caused by Malaysia being a "plural society" always in a state of "stable tension"? Is it the result of increased plurality within the society due to heightened efforts at "modernity competence"? What are the consequences beyond UMNO? These are some of the questions that guide my analysis in the remainder of this presentation.

## Modernization and Malaysian Pluralism

Perhaps we should begin to look for the social roots of these conflicts in the broader framework of Malaysia's attempted embarking on a modernization project since the end of the Second World War. It was indeed in the British interest to maintain a sustainable pluralism in Malaysia in view of its huge economic interest in a colony it considered as one of its "jewels in the crown."

The modernization project was oriented toward two goals: first, to make Malaysia economically developed, and, second, to create a united Malaysian nation through "national integration." The underlying philosophy of the modernization project has been homogenization through the simultaneous pursuit of entrepreneurship and social justice. This was to be realized through the method of planned change that was put in place by the British soon after the Second World War, framed within the Bretton Woods Agreement of 1944, with the direct involvement of the World Bank and the IMF, all inspired by ideas from the Marshall Plan. As implemented by the British, the three central emphases of modernization were security, ethnic bargaining, and development planning meant to sustain peace and harmony.

Let us not forget, too, that, as far as the British and Americans were concerned, Malaysia was seen as surrounded by a ring of revolutionary fire in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam. In Malaysia, there was racial strife, labor unrest, and insurgency. A number of draconian regulations were introduced to maintain "law and order," including the Internal Security Act (ISA) and the introduction of identity cards for all of the population. This whole security apparatus was put in place during the Emergency of 1948–1960. Malaysia achieved its independence during the Emergency in 1957. Instead of the military, it was the police force (uniformed and non-uniformed) that was the central instrument in the overall "security" strategy.

Ethnic bargaining was seen as critical for political stability within the multiethnic society. Compromise was to be achieved mainly through a modern electoral process using an umbrella-like coalition model. Malaysia

had ethnic-based parties, but from day one the British ensured that the major ethnic parties got together to form a team. From this there was born the alliance of Malay and Chinese in the UMNO-MCA Alliance party. The Alliance was later joined by the Indian-based Malaysian Indian Congress. Later known as the Barisan Nasional (BN) or National Front, the Alliance has ruled the country since 1955. This coalition model was also adopted by the opposition political parties, such as the non-Malay dominated Labor Party and the Malay-dominated Socialist Party, which formed the Socialist Front in the 1960s. Other loosely organized political party coalitions emerged in the 1980s.

"Development planning," based on planned change or social engineering not unlike that of the Marshall Plan, was introduced by the British mainly for the purpose of economic reconstruction and management of the war-torn Malaysia. Planning began with the Draft Development Plan for the 1950–1955 period. Since then development planning as well as five-year plans have been permanent features of Malaysia's economic programs (Rudner 1995). The country has had nine five-year plans since 1955. The effort to create each of these five-year plans became an important platform for the economic bargaining over resources among ethnic groups. Most of the plans were financed by funders that included the World Bank and the IMF.

The successful combination of these three ingredients has helped Malaysia to achieve much in its modernization push, but the progress has not been without problems. Viewed from a conceptual perspective, these problems vividly reflect debates and contestations within the philosophy of the Malaysian modernization project over such opposed interests as "entrepreneurship" versus "social justice." Such contestation has also been the result of a modernization project that continues to push for national "homogenization" not unlike that expressed in Ernest Gellner's models of nationalism (Gellner 1997)—despite the fact that Malaysia is increasingly plural. Ideas such as "national integration," "national identity," "national culture," and the like were inscribed in state public policies even though the social reality is characterized by "difference" (cf. Derrida 1982). This contestation was complicated by another struggle, this one posing the interests of affirmative action and ethnic entrpreneurship against various forms of non-ethnic "civic nationalism" (Rawls 1972; Putnam 1993). Perhaps the best illustration of this tension between ethnic entrepreneurship and civically based social justice was found in the formulation and implementation of the pro-Malay affirmative action policy called the New Economic Policy (NEP) of 1970–1990. The two objectives of the NEP were the restructuring of society and the eradication of poverty.

If the efforts at restructuring society were dominated by the entrepreneurship principle, the exercise of the eradication of poverty was motivated mainly by the need for "social justice," both in the universal (rich-poor) and local (interethnic) senses (Shamsul 1990, 1993).

During his prime ministership (1971–1975), Tun Razak was seen to be concerned for balancing both entrepreneurship and social justice. After all, he had been the first minister of rural development, a position established in 1959, and later became the prime mover of Bumiputera Economic Congress in 1965 and 1968, and subsequently implemented the NEP itself. To strike a balance between these two competing orientations, he recruited Malay technocrats to help formulate the NEP. Subsequently, many of the technocrats joined UMNO and became "parachute politicians" sent to contest the general elections of 1974 in "safe seats," usually in electoral constituencies far away from their village of origin.

Hussein Onn (1976–1981), who took over after Razak's sudden demise, continued from where Razak had left off. Unfortunately, however, he inherited all the problems associated with the early implementation of the NEP. During his rule he had to contend with a series of crises within the National Front as well as UMNO. In UMNO, he had to deal with two especially serious problems, namely, the Datuk Harun Idris corruption case and the murder of a veteran UMNO leader, Taha Talib, by his own cabinet minister, Mohktar Hashim. Both were the result of the aggressive push by the Malay elite toward entrepreneurship. Hussein's position as UMNO president was then challenged during an UMNO party election. In 1977–1978, Hussein Onn had to deal with the "Islam Party," PAS, which was at that time one component party in the National Front coalition (it subsequently left). The problem centered on PAS's disagreement with UMNO over the aggressive push for entrepreneurship UMNO was seen as promoting at the expense of, in the PAS View, social justice. The UMNO–PAS conflict became serious and eventually led to a declaration of Emergency in 1978 in the poor, predominantly rural state of Kelantan, the home base of PAS.

The entry of Mahathir Mohamad in 1976 as Hussein's Onn deputy was not unproblematic or uncontested. Mahathir was not Hussein Onn's first choice; Ghazalie Shafie was. Ghazalie was an influential senior civil servant, but was not a member of the UMNO supreme council. As a result, Hussein's choice was challenged and rejected by the UMNO supreme council. Before assuming the post of deputy prime minister and the minister of trade and industry, Mahathir was the education minister responsible for putting down the massive 1974 student protest led by Anwar Ibrahim. When he finally assumed the prime ministership in 1981, Mahathir

launched an entrepreneurship program guided by ideas from his two major books, the *Malay Dilemma* (1970) and *Menghadapi Cabaran* (1978). In these books and in his speeches he analyzed the origins of Malay backwardness and advanced ideas as to how it could be solved based on his belief that "the entrepreneur" is the cornerstone of modernity and Malay progress.

Within the framework of the NEP, Mahathir introduced a series of entrepreneurship-driven policies that reshaped and accelerated the course of modernization (Milne and Mauzy 1999). The most important shift implicit in his vision of modernization was the reorientation of Malaysia's economy away from agriculture and primary commodities to industrial manufacturing. One could say that the Malaysian car, the Proton Saga, became the symbol of this reorientation. Mahathir's entrepreneurial march continued in spite of a series of obstacles: the economic downturn in the mid-1980s, a severe leadership challenge in 1987, and the deregistration of UMNO in 1988. During the next decade, Malaysia enjoyed unprecedented economic growth of 8 percent or more per annum. During this period, Malaysia also saw the implementation of a number of multibillion ringgit mega-projects. These included the production of Kancil, the second Malaysian car; construction of the second causeway linking Malaysia and Singapore; the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) and Putrajaya/Cyberjaya project; the construction of the giant Petronas Twin Towers; the launching of the MAESAT satellite; the completion of the country's North–South Highway; and the opening of the new Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

Mahathir encountered numerous problems in his entrepreneurship march. Not all of the mega-projects came to fruition; the Bakun Dam project, for example, had to be aborted. Mahathir had other domestic problems too. To deal with these problems the prime minister adopted a division of labor between himself, as a prime minister, and the deputy prime minister. As prime minister, Mahathir assumed responsibility for entrepreneurship, including its international components. His deputy prime minister was supposed to concern himself with matters related to "social justice." To assist him in his mission, Mahathir also created his own foreign ministry in the form of the ISIS (Institute of Strategic and International Studies) and an economic "weather station" called MIER (Malaysian Institute of Economic Research).

The prime minister's first deputy was Musa Hitam. He was entrusted by Mahathir with the all-important Ministry of Home Affairs. However, when in 1986 Musa tried to get involved in economic matters, Mahathir pressured him to resign. From then on Mahathir took over the Ministry

of Home Affairs, which he relinquished only in 1999. Ghafar Baba then came in to replace Musa Hitam. In addition to being deputy prime minister, Ghafar was to take charge of the Ministry of National and Rural Development. A trusted ally in the 1987–1988 "Battle Royal" for the UMNO leadership and groomed as Mahathir's successor, Anwar Ibrahim was entrusted with the Ministry of Education and, subsequently, the Ministry of Finance, after Daim Zainuddin, another Mahathir ally, resigned.

Mahathir's division of labor strategy, based on the entrepreneurship-social justice dichotomy, seemed to have worked well for more than a decade, largely due to Malaysia's remarkable economic growth. Mahathir enjoyed unprecedented popularity in the country and became the longest serving prime minister in Malaysian history. The National Front's majority increased with every election. This same strategy also worked to Anwar Ibrahim's benefit. He enjoyed a meteoric rise to power and was also able to build grassroots support in UMNO sufficient to topple Ghafar Baba as the deputy president of UMNO, a post Anwar assumed in the early 1990s.

While the entrepreneurship side of this modernization strategy produced marvelous results, although not without problems, the social justice side was more difficult to pin down. The middle class and enthusiasts of shopping malls and consumer culture benefited from the boom. More generally, there was a new spirit of success summed up in the slogan, *Malaysia Boleh* (lit. "Malaysia Can" or "Malaysia is capable"). Almost unnoticed however, was the fact that political problems were brewing as a result of the NEP strategy, to which we now turn.

## The New Politics: Origins and Formation

The NEP brought not only major social and economic changes, but a redefinition of Malaysian politics. The triumph of "Malay" entrepreneurship under the NEP must be contextualized within the rival claims to legitimacy, power, and piety in that era (Sloane 1999). Thus modern Malay entrepreneurship, irrespective of whether we characterize it as "ersatz," "rentier, or "incubated," implies a tangible victory over competing forms of power, whether they be based on ethnic, political, or class power, or even on the idea that Muslim economic culture is superior to Western capitalism. Certainly, demonstrating entrepreneurship carries tremendous legitimizing force in "new Malay" identity, to the point it has become a kind of meta-symbol (Shamsul 1996a, 1996b, 1999).

Practicing entrepreneurship implies a number of processes. First, it implies a radical transformation of the Malay worldview, a self-generating

move from the *kampung* to the *bandaraya* (metropolis). Second, it also implies an important spiritual transformation, one that establishes economic modernity in Muslim terms. Framed in terms of concern for the worldly and other-worldly consequences, entrepreneurship has been used in this way by moderate pro-Mahathir Muslims, like Anwar Ibrahim, to challenge the perceived backwardness of fundamentalist and radical *dakwah*ism. Third, entrepreneurship also implies class mobility and, with it, the move from an aristocratic ascriptive society to a more meritocratic one in which any *kampung* boy or girl can succeed. Fourth, it implies a vast political transformation, one that allows a kind of openness to Malay politics that begets internal contestations ridden with "money politics." This has led to the freezing of UMNO's president and deputy president posts from the field of party competition, so as to prevent political rivalry and openness from destabilizing the core of Malay power. All this is to say that the emergence of the "new Malay" has brought with it a "new politics" as well.

I would suggest, then, that besides the old and established communal politics that has long characterized Malaysian politics, there is now a new politics based on interest-orientations beyond class and ethnicity. Admittedly, its origin could be traced to a set of broader global circumstances involving all ethnic groups and classes in Malaysia. However, it emerged among Malays and they became its catalyst. It also began in earnest after the NEP was launched.

"Islam first, Malay second" has been ABIM's (the Malay acronym for the Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement) motto since its inception in 1969. ABIM is a powerful and well-organized group consisting mainly of modernist Malay-Muslim ex-student leaders originally led by Anwar Ibrahim. It demonstrated its powerful influence among the students and youths during the December 1974 student uprising, an event many times bigger and more violent than what we have seen live on CNN recently. Thousands of demonstrators were arrested and later charged in court for illegal gathering. Anwar Ibrahim, along with other student leaders and some academics, was arrested under the Internal Security Act and detained for some years at the Kemunting Detention Camp in Taiping, Perak (Syed Husin Ali 1995).

Many analysts and politicians, not least of all Mahathir (who was then minister of education), saw this event as "student politics" pure and simple. It may have been so at the surface and in its outward articulation, but it was certainly more than just that. It was the early beginnings of the new politics in Malaysia, a nascent one, which bears some resemblance to the events of May 1968 in Paris, although less grand in scale and ramifications.

Outside the Malay political realm, and in a quieter mode, NGOs began to mushroom in Malaysia in the 1970s. These organizations represented a variety of interests, ranging from the protection of the consumers, the environment, urban squatters, the Orang Asli, and abused wives and children, to peace, human rights, social justice, and academic freedom. Some thirty of these different interest groups, made up of Malays and non-Malays, men and women, workers and middle class, artists and professionals, formed an alliance in 1980 with Anwar Ibrahim as the chairperson. A few from this group eventually established a Center for Peace Initiatives (CENPEACE) with Fan Yew Teng, a human rights activist and former legislative representative from the Chinese-dominated Democratic Action Party, as its executive director. CENPEACE has since been involved in activities related to "civil society" concerns.

Even though Anwar Ibrahim entered the old mainstream politics when he joined UMNO in 1982, his relationship with the groups within the new politics remained strong. In fact, in the new position he was able to assist these groups and promote the new politics. As finance minister, Anwar was able to contribute indirectly to the strengthening of the financial position of the groups through various means. He arranged to provide tax relief on royalties for writers and artists, and encouraged domestic business groups and international agencies to make generous donations to new political efforts.

At the national level, Anwar also promoted the concept of *masyarakat madani* (a Muslim version of "civil society"). He argued that, not unlike the individual in the Western civil society notion, individuals have rights in the eyes of Allah, as documented clearly in the Qur'an; these must be respected at all cost. Anwar also emphasized that the concept and practice of *masyarakat madani* are rooted in the nation of social justice (*keadilan sosial*). Through CENPEACE and, especially, through an ABIM think tank called Institut Kajian Dasar (IKD), or the Institute of Policy Studies, the concepts of *masyarakat madani* and *keadilan sosial* were promoted in workshops across the nation (Bahari and Muzaffar 1996). Domestically and internationally, Anwar also encouraged what he called "intercivilizational" dialogue, as illustrated, for example, in the Islam-Confucianism Conference held in 1994. A Center for Civilizational Dialogue was set up at the University of Malaya in 1995 to serve this intellectual interest with Prof. Chandra Muzaffar, a well-known social activist and the founder of ALIRAN, as its first professorial director. Anwar published his speeches and writings on these ideas in his *Asian Renaissance* (1996).

Between 1970 and 1997, then, we saw the rise of a new politics in Malaysia, one largely interest-oriented rather than communal, and

non-class based. Admittedly, it was a fragmented movement because each of its constituent organizations spoke for different causes. But its fragmentation also reflected the fact that many observers were trapped in the "old politics" paradigm, looking for ethnicity and class elements. These were of course present but were not central to the movement.

On September 2, 1998, the movement came alive again when its leader, Anwar Ibrahim, left the bandwagon of the old politics: an old politics dominated by powerful bureaucratic and state structures related to the modernization project, an old politics that couldn't care less about the environment, gender, and abused wives. The old politics was motivated by unbridled entrepreneurship greed.

The leaders of the various fragmented groups gathered around their dethroned leader, Anwar Ibrahim, at every opportunity all over the country. They occupied numerous web pages on the Internet. They rallied and received transnational support from anyone who has had a grudge against Mahathir or Malaysia. The voices that we heard through CNN, the Internet, and other sources were not simply pro-Anwar or anti-Mahathir. They were the voice of the new politics in Malaysia, a mass politics of dissent, more interested in creating spaces for political expression than in winning votes. At this stage, they are not on the fringe anymore, they are moving toward the center, trying to carve out a permanent niche.

The new politics movement is here to stay because the masters of the old politics have no intellectual capacity to comprehend what they are facing. They are still full of arrogance of the *bodoh sombong* (lit., "stupid arrogance") kind and embraced by the attitude that money can buy everything, especially political support. They felt the opposition would go away in a few weeks, after a few police commando raids, a few arrests, a few black eyes, a few "turnovers," and thousands of gallons of water from water cannons. They cannot see what is unfolding in front of their eyes except in their old ways. For them all this is just another opposition.

*Reformasi* is the slogan that unites the fragments in the new politics movement. This movement is local in initiatives and ideas but global in its support and intellectual sources. Similar politics have arisen in the developed countries that have enjoyed economic success and social benefits. It is a form of action the German sociologist Ulrich Beck (1997) calls "subpolitics," where personality and politics fuse and develop into multiple trajectories but unite in opposition to the dominating state. Although its methods and agendas are contemporary, almost existentialist, and its appeal popular, the new politics is increasingly attracting support from the same political constituency that the old politics once depended upon.

## Conclusion

Malaysian politics and society have often been characterized as "part authoritarian, part democratic," "semi-democratic," "quasi-democratic," or outright "authoritarian" (Crouch 1966; Case 1996). There is an unspoken agreement among analysts of diverse theoretical persuasions that anything and everything that happens in Malaysia is controlled by the ruling elite (Gomez and Jomo 1997). A few go even further to attribute what has happened in Malaysia over the past decade to none other than Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad (Milne and Mauzy 1999). Some have also argued that the state does allow citizen participation within the marketplace through its "developmentalist project," reserving the political sphere, however, for entrenched elites (see Loh Kok Wah in this volume, and 1999).

Of course, this last argument is only partly true. But why does it continue to persist in Malaysian studies? Why do even Marxisant Malaysianists find it difficult to break away from the plural society analytical frame (Jomo 1986)? Even those who have recently attempted to fashion their analyses along poststructuralist lines (Nair 1999) find themselves unable to find an alternative conceptual frame to "reconstruct" what they have "deconstructed." Not unlike the leaders of the ruling coalition, the National Front, these Malaysianists have not been able to comprehend the reflowering of pluralism unfolding in front of their eyes, not least of all in the form of the new opposition coalition known as the "Alternative Front," or Barisan Alternatif. These observers also seem reluctant to acknowledge, analytically, that Malaysian society is not a uniform entity, but one that has many different forms that coexist, generating divergent developments along a variety of social trajectories. These observers cannot imagine that the language and practice of participation in the marketplace could be in tension with that of the political, religious, or civic. Indeed, as I have argued in this essay, it is civic organizations, above all, that have contributed most to the reflowering of pluralism. Interestingly, the expression and idiom of this pluralism is universal even though its culture of citizenship and democratic civility has been thoroughly shaped in a Malaysian mold.

This shift in political culture in contemporary politics involves a shift away from the colonially generated categories of race, ethnicity, and religion to something that I have termed, heuristically, an "interest-based" politics, largely non-communal and non-ethnic in nature. Because colonially generated classifications and categories still dominate Malaysian

social reality as well as the analytical galaxy of Malaysianists (Shamsul 1998b), the contemporary political culture shift has been seen by most observers as normal and consistent with the old frame, not something new. Precisely due to this "crisis of analysis" the reflowering of pluralism in Malaysia, unleashed by the consequence of the "economic crisis," has not been identified, explained and comprehended. This essay is a modest contribution toward that end.

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# 9

# What Islam, Whose Islam?

## Sisters in Islam and the Struggle for Women's Rights

*Zainah Anwar*

The Islamic resurgence that has recently engulfed most Muslim countries has brought forth tensions and competing ideologies concerning what Islam and whose Islam is the right Islam. Very often, it is the status and rights of women that have become the first casualty in this battleground. It is not surprising, therefore, that women's groups in these countries have been at the forefront of those challenging traditional authorities and their use of religion to justify women's subordination and to incite hatred against those who offer alternative views or protect the rights of women.

For most Muslim women, however, rejecting religion is not an option. We are believers, and as believers we want to find liberation, truth, and justice from within our own faith. We feel strongly we have a right to reclaim our religion, to redefine it, to participate in and contribute to an understanding of Islam, how it is codified and implemented—in ways that take into consideration the realities and experience of women's lives today.

In Malaysia, Sisters in Islam has played a leading role in pushing the boundaries of women's rights within Islam and within the framework of a country that is fast modernizing and relatively democratic, as well as endowed with a federal constitution that respects fundamental liberties and the equality of persons before the law. It is also a country that is multiethnic, multireligious, and caught in the throes of Islamic revivalism and demands for women to play a role as obedient wives and selfless mothers.

Sisters in Islam first came together because of our deep concerns over the injustice women suffered under the implementation of Islamic law, or *shariah*. As professional women and as activists, we were often approached by women who confided in us concerning their marital problems and problems faced when they approached religious authorities. We came together first as the *shariah* subcommittee of the Association of Women Lawyers to look into the problems with the implementation of the Islamic Family Laws.

Many among us were lawyers, but the small group of about twelve professional women also included journalists, university lecturers, and women's rights activists, most of whom were mutual friends. Our first activity was to organize a workshop in 1988 with the National Council of Women's Organizations, the federal government's Women's Affairs Division, and the Islamic Center in the Prime Minister's Department to draw to the attention of the authorities the problems women faced with the implementation of the law. That was only the beginning. Increasingly, we felt that dealing with the law alone was not enough. We felt powerless in the face of complaints by women that they have to suffer in silence because it was said that Islam demands wives be obedient to their husbands, or Islam grants men the right to beat their wives or to take second wives. We felt powerless in the face of seminars on radio, on television, and in religious departments and *shariah* courts where women heard that men are superior to women, that a woman must obey her husband, that the evidence of two women equals that of one man, that a wife has no right to say no to sex with her husband, that hell is full of women because they leave their heads uncovered and are disobedient to their husbands.

Where is the justice for women in all these pronouncements? This questioning, and above all, the conviction that Allah could never be unjust, eventually led us to go back to the primary source of our religion, the Qur'an. We felt the urgent need to read the Qur'an for ourselves and to find out if the text actually supports the oppression and ill-treatment of women.

The process through which Sisters went was liberating and spiritually uplifting. We took the path of *Iqraq* ("Read," the first word revealed to Prophet Muhammad *saw*).[1] Our reading opened a world of Islam that we could recognize, a world for women that was filled with love and mercy and with equality and justice. We need not look any farther to validate our struggle. Women's rights were rooted in our tradition, in our faith. We were more convinced than ever that it is not Islam that oppresses women, but interpretations of the Qur'an influenced by the cultural practices and values of a patriarchal society. For much of Islamic history, it is men who

have interpreted the Qur'an and the traditions for us. Women's voices, women's experience, and women's realities had been largely silent and silenced in the reading and interpretation of the text. When Sisters read the text, we discovered words, messages, and meanings that we were never taught in traditional education on Islam.

For us, all this was the beginning of a new journey of discovery. It was a revelation to us that the verse on polygamy (Surah an-Nisa, 4:3) said, "if you fear you shall not be able to deal justly with women, then marry only one." How is it that half of the verse that said a man can have up to four wives came to be universally accepted as a codified legal right but the other half of the very same verse that promotes monogamy is unheard of ? It dawned on us that when men read the verse, they only saw "marry up to four wives." They heard the word of God that validated their desire and their experience. When women read the verse, they heard clearly, "if you fear you cannot deal justly with women, then marry only one." Women understood that the right to polygamy was conditional, and if a man cannot fulfill those conditions of equal and just treatment, then Allah said marry only one. In fact the verse goes on to say that "this will be best for you to prevent you from doing injustice." What further validation do we need to argue that polygamy is not an unconditional right in Islam, but is a responsibility allowed only in exceptional circumstances?

During this initial process of studying and rediscovering our religious text, we were lucky to have with us a theologian who had completed her Ph.D. thesis on the Qur'an and Woman. Dr. Amina Wadud, then teaching in the Department of Revealed Knowledge and Comparative Religion at the International Islamic University in Kuala Lumpur, guided us in our reading and understanding of the Qur'an. We engaged in Qur'anic hermeneutics, a model that looks at the socio-historical context of revelation as a whole; we looked at syntactical structures and grammatical compositions and at the whole text to understand its worldview. Using this hermeneutical approach, we derived the values and principles that underlie the Qur'anic message. It is these values and principles that are universal and eternal and that serve as our guide, rather than the cultural and historical specificities of seventh-century Arabia. We provided Dr. Amina an opportunity for interface between her theology and methodology and our experience of the socio-legal realities of lived Islam and the challenges of being Muslim women in a modernizing society where Islam increasingly shapes our lives.

This, then, was the beginning of our struggle to stand up for women's rights within an Islamic framework. Through our study and consultation with Islamic scholars inside and outside the country, we developed a

framework through which we could stand up and argue for justice and equality for Muslim women in contentious areas such as polygamy, equal rights, dress and modesty, domestic violence, hudud laws, freedom of expression, and other fundamental liberties.

## The Challenge

The struggle for equality and justice for Muslim women must be placed within the context of women living in Muslim societies. Since the early 1970s, Muslim societies in all parts of the world have been caught up in the throes of a resurgent Islam. However, all too often in the turn to Islam as a way of life and the source for solutions to the ills and injustices that beset our societies, the place of women has become the first and easiest measure of a group or society's commitment to the faith. It is as if those who have turned to Islam cannot cope with the monumental challenges posed by the fast-changing world, so they focus on the most disempowered in society to prove their ability to dominate and bring about change in the name of Islam. Such an approach does not help the Muslim world deal with the critical change so palpable around us. The challenge we confront is how to reconcile the tenets of our faith with modernity, plurality, and our changing circumstances.

The response to this challenge has led to various discourses on Islam and rights. The discourse about women's rights in Islam has taken three broad strands. First are those Muslims who acknowledge that Islam liberated women and granted them rights unknown in any other society. They point out the Qur'anic injunctions that recognize a woman's right to contract marriage, to divorce, to inherit and dispose of her property as she pleases. The Qur'an also outlawed female infanticide and enforced the payment of the dowry to the bride herself, not to her father or guardian. Yet, while progressive in tendency, this ethical vision of equality and justice for women in the Qur'an did not develop further or sustain an emancipatory or egalitarian thrust within the subsequently developed Muslim juristic heritage. Instead, the process of interpretation and codification of the laws, dominated by male jurists and scholars, led to an orthodox mainstream view that men and women in effect are not equal. In responding to the international discourse on women's rights, such Muslims, including women educated about Islam by traditional teachers, say that because men and women are not the same, there cannot be equality. Instead, they say that in Islam men and women complement each other and therefore what Islam recognizes is equity not equality. What this means is that

because men and women are different, they have separate and distinct roles to play. This leads to befuddled positions: women can work outside the home, but only with the permission of their husbands; women can be doctors but they must not touch male patients; women can be heads of departments in charge of men, but they cannot be in charge at home for they must remain obedient to their husbands.

The second strand reflects the obscurantist view that men and women are inherently unequal in Islam, quoting verses in the Qur'an such as 4:34, which talks about men being responsible for women and 2:228, which mentions that men are a "degree higher" than women. Such verses are interpreted literally and atomistically to legitimize men's dominance over women. Other verses in the Qur'an and traditions of the Prophet *saw* have been interpreted to mean that women cannot be leaders, work outside the house, participate in the performing arts, or be heard in public because a woman's voice is part of her private parts (*aurah*) that can only be seen by close relatives. Conservative Islamists believe in the total segregation of women and men and the confinement of a woman to the four walls of the house to take care of her husband, children, and household chores. If women can be educated at all, that education is not meant for a career outside the home, but to help women be better wives and mothers.

Between these two positions lies a precarious middle ground—a space within which some of the most creative and humanly inclusive socio-legal thought is now being created (Othman 1997). But like courageous and innovative thinking elsewhere, this socio-legal modernism remains on the fringe of Islamic thought and activism in the Muslim world. This discourse about women's rights, human rights, democracy, and modernity is promoted by Muslim scholars who advocate a critical reexamination of exegetical and jurisprudential texts as well as a reinterpretation of Islam's foundational religious text and traditions. It is within this discourse that Muslims advocating equal rights for women have emphasized the problematic nature of textual interpretation and legal codification.

This effort at reexamining juridical and exegetical opinion has led to tensions and conflict among Muslims—between those who advocate reform and those who believe that the doors of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) were closed centuries ago. Just as the cultural mores of urban Middle Eastern society during the Abbasid era—which licensed polygamy, concubinage, and easy divorce for men and treated women as sexual objects—informed how the text was interpreted and codified, so too should today's changing realities of women's lives inform our reading of the text and our effort to render its meanings into laws for a modern, democratic, and pluralistic state.

Women's groups like Sisters in Islam base their ethical vision of Islam on the absolute moral and spiritual equality of women and men. This vision is expressed in verses such as Surah 33:35, on the common obligations placed on all individuals regardless of sex; Surah 3:195, which declares that men and woman are members one of another; Surah 2:187, which describes Muslim men and women as each other's garments; and Surah 9:71, the final verse on the relationship between men and women, which talks about them being each other's *'awliyya-* protecting friends and guardians (*'awliyya*). This vision is also expressed in the obligations for both men and women to enjoin what is just and forbid what is evil, to observe regular prayers, to tithe (*zakat*), and to show obedience to Allah and his Messenger. These verses are unequivocally egalitarian in spirit and substance and reflect the Qur'anic view on the relationship between men and women.[2] This egalitarian vision also extends to human biology. The verses on the creation of men and women talk about the characteristic of pairs in creation (51:49, 53:45, 78:8, 50:7, 22:5, 36:36). Since everything created must be in pairs, the male and female must both be necessary, must exist by virtue of their createdness. Neither one comes before the other or from the other. One is not superior to the other, nor a derivative of the other. This means that in Allah's creation of human beings, no priority or superiority is accorded to either man or woman.

It is this ethical voice of the Qur'an insistently enjoining the equality of all individuals that has been largely absent in the body of political and legal thought in Islam. When women decided to read the Qur'an for themselves, they discovered this ethical message of equality and justice. They began to read about different movements and sects that existed from the earliest days of Islam, but were silenced and marginalized by the dominant androcentric voice that validated men's superiority and control over women (Ahmed 1992, 67).[3]

## Islam, Modernity, and Democracy in Malaysia

In spite of this, in Southeast Asian societies, particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia, Muslim women have enjoyed far more freedoms and rights compared to their sisters in the Middle East and South Asia. In Malay society, as in other Southeast Asian societies, cultural traditions (*adat*) affirm women's public contribution or participation in often positive, non-hierarchical ways.[4] Women have always owned and inherited property in Malaysia. Women worked outside the home. Seclusion or *purdah* was not part of Malay culture. Nor were women expected to be veiled outside their

home or forbidden from mixing freely in public space. Women never needed the written permission of their husbands or male guardians to travel abroad. There was never a tradition of a segregated women's quarters in Malay homes. Women today enjoy equal access to education. In fact, in 1998 more than 55 percent of students in the public universities were women. Malaysian women have long enjoyed the benefits of a more egalitarian Islam relative to women in the Middle East or South Asia.

This recognition of women's rights in Malaysia led to a remarkable program of codification of a uniform Islamic Family Law in the late 1970s and early 1980s, resulting in legislation that is among the most enlightened in the Muslim world. It grants women extensive rights and protection from injustice. The new law introduced five strict conditions which a husband has to fulfill before permission can be granted for polygamy. A woman is entitled to apply for divorce (*fasakh*) on twelve different grounds. She is entitled to initiate divorce if her husband breaks the marriage contract by failing to maintain her for more than four months, or by abusing her or by deserting her for over a year. She is entitled to a division of the matrimonial property whether she has financially contributed to its acquisition or not. The labor and time she has put in as mother and wife are taken into consideration.

This progressive codification of the Islamic Family Laws of Malaysia was initiated by the National Council of Women's Organizations (NCWO) and the late Professor Ahmad Ibrahim, then the dean of the newly established Law Faculty of the University of Malaya. Professor Ahmad, a highly respected legal scholar who had served as Singapore's attorney general and ambassador to Egypt, was concerned about upgrading the status of Islamic law in Malaysia. To do this, he strongly felt that the state had to modernize its religious administration by codifying Islamic laws, using all four schools of law as sources, instead of just the Shafi'i school dominant in Malaysia (and most of Southeast Asia), and using the principle of acting in the best interest of the community (a principle known as *maslahah*) as a guide in deciding which school to follow on each issue. At the same time, pressure for reform to protect women's rights in divorce and marriage came from the NCWO, whose president at the time, Tan Sri Fatimah Hashim, was also the head of the women's wing of the dominant party (UMNO) in the ruling National Front government. Her husband was then the attorney general and minister of law, and through him, many of the changes pushed for by the NCWO and Professor Ahmad were accepted by the government.[5]

The process, however, was not all smooth sailing. The passage of the bill in parliament in 1984 was met with much resistance from certain Muslim

male parliamentarians. According to the then chief whip of the government, Datuk Pathmanaban, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad had a hard time convincing all the MPs to vote for the bill.[6] A number of the MPs claimed the bill contained un-Islamic provisions, especially those restricting polygamy. Dr. Mahathir had to use the women's clout as vote getters to win the men's support, saying that the bill was in return for the strong support and recognition of the important role women party members played in getting out the vote during the general elections. Even then, there was still resistance. In the end, the party had to impose a three-line whip to ensure that the bill would pass comfortably. According to parliamentary rule, this meant every member had to be present during the debate, no one could speak against the bill, and all had to vote for the passage of the bill.

However, much as women in Malaysia enjoy many rights and benefits that are often denied to their sisters in other Muslim countries, there is growing concern that the reassertion of conservative Islam undermines women's ability to take advantage of the rights granted under the law. In fact, as Malaysia is caught in the throes of Islamic revivalism, the Islam traditionally practiced in the country has evolved to adopt more Arabic inflections of the religion that really reflect the culture of gender and family relations of a patriarchal and tribal Middle Eastern society.[7] Over the past several years, women in Malaysia have seen a steady erosion of freedom and rights in the areas of law and access to the *shariah* legal system, as well as in rights of dress, family, public participation, and socialization between the sexes. In public we are seeing increasing segregation of men and women.

At both social and political levels, the Islamic agenda today is increasingly dominated by the discourse of conservative groups demanding the establishment of an Islamic state and a return to the days of a putatively pristine Islam in seventh-century Arabia. Within this worldview there is no room for dissenting and differing opinions, not even for those Islamists who believe in working for change within Islam through a dynamic approach to interpreting the Qur'an. To these doctrinal Islamist groups, any process of reinterpretation of the message to deal with the challenges of contemporary society is an act of heresy as it tantamount to questioning the word of God. This view conveniently ignores the fact that every pronouncement they make accusing others of heresy or of having deviated from the faith is also an act of interpretation. They themselves are practicing independent reason (*ijtihad*) in dealing with the challenge posed to them by progressive Islamists. Because they have claimed for themselves the exclusive monopoly to define what is Islamic, they deny Muslims with

alternative views the right to speak. The result is that very few individuals and groups dare to offer their alternative views and criticism on Islamic issues, thus further entrenching the hegemonic power of the obscurantists.

The growing influence of these groups can be seen in several new laws, policies, and amendments to existing Islamic laws introduced in the 1990s. These reflect a trend toward repression of women's rights and the fundamental liberties of citizens living in a democratic country. In all these instances, women's groups, in particular Sisters in Islam, have led the way in protesting against these efforts to reverse the gains women have enjoyed in Malaysia or deny Muslim women the same legal rights and protections granted to their non-Muslim sisters.

Some of the changes made in the name of Islam that women's groups have had to battle with in the 1990s include the following.

**1. *Shariah* Criminal Code (II) 1993 of the State of Kelantan.** This bill contains contentious provisions for *hudud* punishments such as flogging, amputation of limbs, stoning to death, and crucifixion. It also discriminates against women in several ways: the presumption of *zina* (adultery/illicit sex) by an unmarried woman if she is pregnant or has delivered a baby, even though she might have been raped; the disqualification of women as eyewitnesses in court cases; the termination of a marriage by a husband's accusation (*al-li'an*—a statutory declaration by a husband accusing the wife of adultery), whether proved or not, of adultery against his wife; the implied endorsement of the view that *diyat* or compensation for death or injury to a woman should be half that of a man.[8]

Sisters submitted a memorandum to the government, expressing our concerns over such unjust and gender-biased provisions in the *hudud* bill, which was passed by the Kelantan state assembly unanimously, including the vote of the then two opposition National Front state assemblymen. Kelantan is under the control of the Islamist party, PAS, which is committed to the establishment of an Islamic state and the implementation of Islamic *shariah* as the law of the land. However, the Malaysian federal constitution lists crime as a federal matter, and therefore without an amendment to the constitution, the Kelantan state government has been unable to implement this criminal legislation and has blamed the federal government for its inability to take action on its party commitment. The prime minister has also unequivocally stated that he would not allow the *hudud* bill to be implemented.

This position, however, did not stop the two National Front members belonging to the coalition party in power at the federal level from supporting the *hudud* bill. Their action reflected the fear of elected representatives to oppose anything done in the name of Islam. Even though their

party at the federal level was opposed to the *hudud* bill, the two state assemblymen deemed it necessary for their political survival to join in the unanimous support for the bill in a state where more than 95 percent of the population are Muslim and where PAS has ruled for thirty-two out of the past forty-two years.

**2. The Domestic Violence Act 1994.** When consultations first began between NGOs and various government agencies concerning such an act, there were attempts to exclude Muslims from the jurisdiction of the act because of the belief that Muslim men had a right to beat their wives. Sisters objected to this interpretation and as part of the campaign for an all-inclusive act published a booklet entitled *Are Muslim Men Allowed to Beat their Wives?* After five long years of negotiation, consensus was reached, albeit an unsatisfactory one as far as the women's groups were concerned, and the Domestic Violence Act (DVA) was finally passed by parliament in 1994. In spite of this, it took two more years and a public campaign by women's groups to finally see the law gazetted and implemented. This was because certain officials in religious authority and a number of influential senior civil servants objected to its application to Muslims, this despite official assurances that nothing in the bill was contrary to Islam.

The objections to the act were twofold. First, its opponents argued that "a few things under *syarak* [Islamic law] are not considered violent, but under the DVA are considered violent," implying that domestic violence may constitute a crime if committed by non-Muslims, but not by Muslims. Second, there was a question of jurisdiction. It was claimed that domestic violence is a family matter and not a crime and therefore should come under the *shariah* jurisdiction of each state. Women's groups objected to these arguments.[9] In a letter to the editor, Sisters in Islam pointed out that domestic violence is a crime under the act and the act as a criminal law therefore comes under federal jurisdiction.[10] SIS pointed out the gender bias in the argument by the opponents to the law because the Child Protection Act was passed in parliament in 1994 without any objection that this was a family matter and should therefore fall under *shariah* jurisdiction. In the same manner that the abuse of a child within the family is recognized as a crime, so should violence against women and other members of the family. We also argued that all persons who commit an act of violence must be subjected to the same criminal law in this country and survivors of domestic violence must be provided with equal protection under one law, and not fourteen different and contradictory state religious laws. There was also no guarantee that all states would adopt such laws because there were many among those in religious authority at the state level who believed that men had a right to beat their wives, based on

their interpretation of verse 4:34 in the Qur'an. Moreover the record of the religious court in the implementation of provisions in the Islamic Family Law had discriminated against women because of entrenched prejudices against women. In June 1996, women's groups finally succeeded in getting the Domestic Violence Act gazetted and implemented to include Muslims.

**3. Amendments to the Islamic Family Law.** Since the early 1990s, several states in Malaysia have amended the Islamic Family Law to the disadvantage of women. The amendments include, first, allowing a polygamous marriage contracted without the permission of the court to be registered, upon payment of a fine or jail sentence. Even though the law states that no polygamous marriage can be contracted without the prior written permission of the court, this provision was later amended to allow the above exception. This has led to a proliferation of illegal polygamous marriages contracted in southern Thailand or by illegal marriage syndicates operating in Malaysia. In some states the number of polygamous marriages contracted without the permission of the courts is more than three times the officially sanctioned ones.[11] With the loophole in the law, these marriages can now be registered upon the payment of a minimum fine for breaking the law. No man has been imprisoned for breaking this law.

Second, the amendments also include deleting the fifth condition before permission for polygamy can be granted. The fifth condition requires that the proposed polygamous marriage should not directly or indirectly lower the standard of living enjoyed by the existing wife and dependents. Its deletion makes it easier for a man to be given permission to take a second wife. According to Professor Ahmad Ibrahim, this condition was deleted because some religious scholars argued that it would be impossible for men to be granted permission for polygamy because the standard of living of the first wife and children would naturally be affected by the existence of a second family.[12] We felt it could have been argued that if there was no substantial increase in the man's income, his application to take a second wife should not merit any consideration.

Third, the amendments include registration of divorces pronounced outside court. The original intention of the law reform committee was to stop the common practice of unilateral declarations of divorce by irresponsible husbands. Thus a divorce can only be pronounced in court. But this provision was amended to allow the court to approve divorces pronounced by a man without court permission if the court is satisfied that the *talaq* (repudiation of the marriage) is valid. As a result of this amendment, research shows that the number of men who unilaterally divorce their wives outside the court is almost three times those who applied for

divorce through the courts.[13] This amendment is a serious setback because divorce is often granted to men without any ancillary claims being settled. More cruelly, women often found out they had been divorced merely through a bureaucratic letter from the *shariah* court informing them of their husbands' unilateral act.

Other rights terminated by the new amendments included the termination of a woman's right to maintenance if she was *nusyuz*[14] and the right to accommodation if she committed *fahisyah* (open lewdness) The maintenance of an illegitimate child also now falls solely on the mother. The amendment to terminate maintenance due to *nusyuz* has led to widespread abuse by husbands who want to evade their responsibility to maintain their wives. In many divorce cases, the husbands have failed to maintain their wives for years during the marriage and the wives would submit an application for arrears in maintenance as part of the divorce settlement. It is now common for the wife who initiates divorce to receive a letter from the husband's lawyer accusing her of *nusyuz*, which she then has to disprove in court. In a number of cases studied, the court seldom asked the husband to prove his allegation of *nusyuz* while the woman's evidence was disregarded.[15]

Taken together, all these amendments reflect the increasingly conservative turn Islamic policies in Malaysia have taken with regard to the rights of women. According to Professor Ahmad Ibrahim, who chaired the Technical Committee on *Shariah* and Civil Laws responsible for first drafting Islamic laws, the committee came under pressure from some religious scholars (*ulama*) to amend the laws, which they felt were too restrictive on men's rights. Even though some members of the committee (which is made up of civil and *shariah* lawyers) did not agree, they had to concede to the demands in order to retain the other, more liberal provisions.

**4. Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination.** When Malaysia first ratified the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in July 1995, it placed reservations on five of the thirty articles on the grounds that they were in conflict with *shariah* law and the federal constitution. These articles and their subclauses include the right of women to participate in public life, to enter into marriage with full consent, to choose a spouse, and to own property. In all the instances of reservations, they involved rights that Malaysian women already enjoyed, with the exception of the right to become a sultan, the right to be appointed as a *shariah* court judge, the right to guardianship, and the equal right to acquire, change, or retain nationality. In the last three cases in particular, the reservations would only apply until Malaysia reforms its laws. The reservation on Article 5a, which requires governments to mod-

ify social and cultural patterns of conduct based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women implies that the government of Malaysia takes a position that women and men are not equal, contradicting its own existing policies and practices and commitments to equality in national development policies, as well as international documents and declarations.

Women's groups protested these ill-informed reservations. In a meeting with the attorney general and his officers, we were told that the chambers had consulted Islamic scholars who decided that those rights were un-Islamic, not withstanding the fact that Malaysia has already recognized women's rights to equality, to hold public office, to own property, and to enter into marriage with full consent. These rights are in fact recognized by Islam. And yet, when established religious authorities spoke, no one dared raise a word in objection. Once again because of intensive lobbying by women's groups in preparation for the Beijing conference, the government has since withdrawn those reservations which have no basis in Islam and which contradict existing laws and policies. Only two specific reservations now remain in place.

**5. The *Shariah* Criminal Offenses Act of 1997.** This law came to public light after the arrest of three Muslim girls who participated in the Miss Malaysia Petite contest in June 1997. They were immediately charged and found guilty for indecent dressing and for violating a *fatwa* that banned Muslim women from participating in beauty contests. And yet a few days after they were arrested, Malaysian television covered the Mr. Malaysia contest, where Muslim men in the skimpiest of swimming trunks displayed their near naked bodies for the public to admire. No action was taken against these men as the law provided that only women who dressed "indecently" in public would be punished.

Since 1994, most states in Malaysia have adopted the *Shariah* Criminal Offenses Act/Enactment, which contains provisions that have no basis in the textual sources of Islam, and furthermore, violate fundamental principles of democracy and the civil liberties of Malaysians as guaranteed by the federal constitution. These laws were passed without any substantive debate in parliament or state legislative assemblies, thus leaving the public ignorant of the draconian direction that the Islamic administration in Malaysia had taken.

Under the Administration of Islamic Law Act, religious declarations, or *fatwas*, issued by the state mufti (the top religious official at the state level) have been given the automatic force of law, once they are gazetted, without going through the legislative process. The new *Shariah* Criminal Offenses Law states that any violation of the *fatwa*, or any effort to

dispute or to give an opinion contrary to the *fatwa*, constitutes a criminal offense. To even possess books on Islam that are contrary to a *fatwa* currently in force is also an offense. Only the mufti has the power to revoke or amend a *fatwa*. These provisions are tantamount to rule by decree of a theocratic dictatorship. And yet these laws sailed smoothly, first through the drafting and official approval stages and then through the legislative process.[16]

Historically in Muslim societies, legal declarations of this sort never had the automatic force of law. Nor was it a crime for anyone to disagree with or to violate a *fatwa*. *Fatwas* are theological and legal reasonings given by a mufti to enlighten and educate the public about Islam and to assist them in arranging their affairs in accordance with the *shariah*. They are regarded as advisery opinion and are not binding and enforceable on the people. They act merely as a guidance, not as an order for the government to enforce by law.

One reason why the doctrine of binding precedent did not evolve in Islam is due to the belief that the opinion of one *mujtahid* (a person of religious learning who practices independent reasoning [*ijtihad*]) can never be regarded as the final wisdom in understanding the infinite message of the Qur'an. Another *mujtahid* can give an equally valid opinion based on his learned understanding of the text. In the context of lawmaking in a modern democratic state, these differences of opinion should be debated fully in public. The legislative body, taking into consideration public opinion and the best interest of the community, will then decide which opinion it wants to turn into law.

What is of most concern here is how these laws could have been passed by all relevant arms of the state and federal governments without so much as a discussion on the wisdom of casting such undemocratic, unconstitutional, and, some would say, un-Islamic, provisions into law. Again, this reflects the fear and ignorance of most officials and politicians on Islamic matters that they seem so ready and willing to equate the opinion of those in religious authority to the word of God, and therefore not to be questioned.

## What Islam, Whose Islam is the Right Islam?

If one were to examine all the above examples on Islamic matters in the 1990s, they all seem bent on curbing the civil liberties of Malaysia's Muslim citizens and, in particular, the rights of women. They serve to reaffirm the orthodox Islamist worldview of an Islamic state: all citizens are not

equal in such a state; there are different rights for men, women, and minorities rather than equal rights for all; leadership is by the *ulama,* and their words and injunctions cannot be questioned or challenged. The remarkable spirit of equality and justice that informed the effort at legal reform in the mid-1970s and early 1980s and resulted in one of the most enlightened Islamic Family Laws in the Muslim world seems like a distant past. Why is there such a huge gap between the ideals of justice and equality insistently enjoined in the Qur'an and the realities of many Muslim societies today?

These trends in law- and policy-making in the name of Islam are a reflection of the increasingly obscurantist strand of Islam that is now taking root in Malaysia. The change began in the early to mid-1980s, when the Islamic resurgence in the country took a radical turn. Many events converged to push the Islamic movement in Malaysia in this direction. First was the return of hundreds of Malay students from England, the first product of the New Economic Policy, influenced and radicalized by the conservative, some would say, extremist and intolerant Islam of the Jamaat-i-Islami of Pakistan and the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, whose followers lived and studied in Britain. The new returnees fanned out as young lecturers and teachers in the local universities and residential schools set up by the government to educate the brightest Malay students. While fulfilling their government contracts, they also began to spread a more black-and-white approach to the Islamic struggle, nurturing a more militant generation of Islamists. Some among these students declared the government infidel and demanded the creation of an Islamic state.

A second influence was the leadership crisis in PAS, which eventually led to the overthrow of its more nationalist Old Guard leadership and a takeover of the party by the Young Turks. Many of the latter were graduates in theology and jurisprudence from Middle Eastern universities, in particular al-Azhar in Egypt. The PAS struggle quickly acquired a more radical tone with its call for the creation of an Islamic state with the Qur'an and Sunnah as the constitution and the *shariah* law in place of national civil law. Influenced by the revolution in Iran, the party called for leadership by religious scholars (the *ulama*) and elevated the council of religious scholars (Majlis Ulama) to become the party's highest policy-making body. Its advice and pronouncements would be binding upon the central executive committee (Zanies 1987, 41–42).

These changes in the political and social landscape forced the government and the dominant party in the national coalition (UMNO) to turn to Islam to enhance their own political legitimacy. Although the struggle for race, religion, and nation had always been integral to the UMNO raison

d'être, the government and UMNO had long made an effort to separate religious and political authority, as it saw traditional Islam as obstructive to its mission to uplift the socio-economic condition of the Malays. By late 1982, however, UMNO, with its membership of over a million, declared itself the biggest Islamic party in the world and announced an Islamization policy to create a society that would be better imbibed with universal Islamic values. Thus, a government that since independence had separated religious and political authority now sought to co-opt its critics by appealing to a certain vision of Islam for legitimacy.[17]

In the rural heartland of the conservative Malay-dominated states of Kelantan, Terengganu, and Kedah, however, PAS has denied UMNO the religious legitimacy it seeks. PAS claims that it is the true Islamic party because of its mission to establish an Islamic state and implement the *shariah*. PAS declared UMNO a party of infidels for its failure to turn Malaysia into an Islamic state, change the federal constitution to the Qur'an and Sunnah of the Prophet, and impose *shariah* rule. For UMNO, however, the formation of an Islamic state is a position it could never support. This would not only alienate half the population, but, more important, it would destabilize a system built on the politics of accommodation among the competing interests of a plural and multicultural society.

PAS attacks the government's Islamization policy as "cosmetic Islamization," designed not to create an Islamic state, but to slow the momentum toward a more Islamic society. PAS speakers have condemned the government's step-by-step process of inculcating Islamic values as implying that Islam is imperfect, and thus to be taken in small doses. UMNO leaders, however, have always contended that it is not necessary to create an Islamic state for the government and the people to be Islamic. The Islamization policy in Malaysia is therefore a process of instilling Islamic values and principles that are universal and acceptable to all in the administration and policies of government. To live in peace and cooperate with the other races, to eradicate poverty, to uplift the socio-economic status of people—all these are seen as Islamic activities.

Given the continuing religious fervor within Malaysia and PAS's emotional appeal for an Islamic state, UMNO will have to continue to locate its struggle within the Islamic framework in order to maintain its legitimacy. However, the stark fact that 45 percent of Malaysia's population is non-Muslim means the government in its exhortation of Islam is walking a political tightrope. It is constrained by the realities of governing a multiethnic and multireligious country and the necessity for support not just from Malays, but also from non-Malays. And yet the government has to

demonstrate its commitment to Islam in order to maintain its legitimacy among the religiously aroused electorate.

As part of its Islamization policy, the government has created new Islamic institutions to provide an alternative to Muslims who want to lead a life in accordance with the tenets of Islam. It established an Islamic Bank and the International Islamic University, both in 1983, a system of Islamic insurance (the Syarikat Takaful), and Islamic pawnshops. It also increased the number of Islamic primary and secondary schools and colleges. It modernized and upgraded the administration of Islam in the country, separated the *shariah* courts from the religious departments, and established a three-tiered *shariah* judicial structure, the lower court, the high court and the *shariah* appeals court. It amended Article 121 of the federal constitution to exclude the civil courts from exercising any jurisdiction on any matter within the jurisdiction of the *shariah* courts. The government also embarked on a program of inculcating Islamic values among government employees through regular religious classes and promoting rules on dress, male-female socializing, and cultural and sports activities consistent with Islamic values.

The government's Islamization policy expanded the influence of religious authorities on society and government. Coupled with the Islamic fervor of independent religious groups with their own alternative Islamic schools, medical clinics, and other institutions, and with an opposition party committed to the creation of an Islamic state, all this led to a society in the 1990s that was more religiously conservative than ever before. What is of concern here, then, is not the increasing commitment of Muslims to Islam, but the spread of a more conservative and intolerant strain of Islam. The tendency toward a narrowly restrictive interpretation of Islam, discrimination against women, intolerance of mixing with non-Muslims, and blanket condemnation of Muslims who disagree with these things as infidels or deviationists all alarm and challenge the liberalism, tolerance, and accommodation that have long been the hallmark of this plural society. The continuous demand for an Islamic social order in Malaysia has led to various levels of conflict at the governmental and societal levels on what Islam and whose Islam is the right Islam.

**1.** ***Conflict between government policy on women and traditional Islamic teachings.*** At a time when more Malaysian women than men qualify for higher education, when women are joining the workforce in record numbers and are promoted to senior positions in government and the private sector, many among those in religious authority bombard the general public with messages contrary to these changing gender roles and realities.

We have on the one hand, a Malaysian government that encourages women to pursue higher education, to join the workforce, and to actively participate in the economic growth of the country. On the other hand, however, an important arm of the government, the religious authority, is sending conflicting signals about the proper role of women in the family and society that has little bearing on the changing realities of women's lives today.[18] The degree of independence and access to public spaces enjoyed by religious officials in the country has enabled them to push their obscurantist vision of women's rights and responsibilities into the public sphere. This has led to much confusion among women who on the one hand want to be good Muslims, but on the other hand want the right to higher education, to a career, and to a marriage based on equal partnership.

**2.** ***Conflict between the substance and spirit of the codified Islamic laws and personal beliefs of state religious officials.*** While provisions in Malaysia's Islamic Family Law grant women many rights, too often these rights remain on paper only because of weaknesses in the implementation of the law and in the *shariah* system itself. Many judges in the *shariah* courts display blatant gender bias in their handling of matrimonial cases initiated by women. While men can unilaterally pronounce divorce and register it with just a single hearing of the case, women seeking a divorce often endure endless delays that can last for years. Their cases are delayed over and over again because their husbands ignore orders to attend counseling sessions, to be present at court hearings, or to attend arbitration proceedings. Even though the law provides for the judge to confer the authority to divorce on behalf of the husband if the parties fail to effect reconciliation, the court is reluctant to use this provision.

These laws were drafted at the federal level following a campaign for reform by women's groups and supported by a political leadership and key Islamic scholars who believe in a more enlightened interpretation of Islam and women's rights. However, the religious authorities at the state level responsible for implementing Islamic laws often do not share this vision, disagreeing with what they consider the liberal provisions in the Islamic Family Law. For example, in most states in Malaysia, a man has to fulfill four conditions before he can be granted the permission to marry a second wife. However, in practice, it is usually the man's financial ability to support a second family that is considered, if at all. The other conditions—just and necessary reason, the ability to treat his wives equally, and that the proposed marriage would not cause physical, mental, or spiritual harm to the existing wife—are often ignored. At most, the husband may be asked to declare that he would fulfill the other three conditions, with no effort made to adduce supporting evidence and documentation to prove

his ability to do so. A woman who objected to her husband's application to take a second wife soon after the implementation of the new Islamic Family Law reported that the *shariah* court judge asked her whether she wanted to obey the laws of Aishah Ghani, minister of women's affairs at the time, or the laws of God. Within a week of the interview, her husband was granted permission without any evidence in support of the conditions he had to fulfill.

This conflict between the codified law and personal belief is most blatant in the area of polygamy. Most in religious authority believe that polygamy is a God-given right in Islam and therefore no restrictions should be placed on its practice. Moreover, they assert that those conditions codified into law do not exist in the Qur'an and are therefore un-Islamic. Based on this personal belief, religious officials tend to be sympathetic to a man's application for polygamy and have advised men who have been denied permission to break the law by going to southern Thailand or to another state where they do not have to fulfill strict conditions for polygamy. In the state of Selangor, one of the many religious courses conducted by the Islamic authorities in 1996 was a course called "My Husband, Your Husband" to promote the practice and acceptance of polygamy. This course was later withdrawn because of public criticism.

The conflict between federal and state religious authorities also affects the administration of Islam in the country. On the one hand, the federal government, in particular the prime minister, Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, believes in a progressive vision of Islam and in the necessity of reinterpreting the Qur'an to meet the challenges of contemporary society. On the other hand, most of those in religious authority at the state level are fundamentally opposed to this progressive vision. Efforts at law reform and uniformity of Islamic laws, initiated by the federal government, are often resisted by state officials, who guard their independence jealously and who often hold obscurantist values on women's rights and fundamental liberties. Even when there has been legal reform, this first step at change has not been accompanied by any change in the mind-set of officials who are responsible for implementing those laws. For example, when officials underwent training in the new provisions of the Islamic Family Law, no training was provided to help them understand the perspectives and rationales for such reform. A woman lecturer who taught Islamic family law was not allowed to teach these officials who attended the training programs at the International Islamic University because of "sensitivities."

**3.** ***The conflict in understanding the difference between what is revealed and therefore divine and infallible, and what is the result of***

***human intellectual effort and social customs, and therefore fallible and changeable.*** Out of a total of over 6,200 verses in the Qur'an, only about 80 deal with legal prescriptions. The bulk of what is considered *shariah* today is made up of an enormous body of juristic efforts in interpreting the limitless message of the Qur'an. This is a human effort, an achievement by a group of people dealing with particular problems within a particular socio-historical context.[19] Given a changing set of circumstances, an interpretation made today would differ from one made a thousand years ago, or even one hundred years ago. What should be universal and valid for all times are the underlying principles of justice, equality, freedom, and virtue insistently enjoined by the Qur'an. It is these principles that should form the framework within which we seek to reconstruct society today. Any law, any practice, any interpretation that violates these principles should not be acceptable (Osman 1994).

And yet traditional Islamic scholars have elevated the interpretations and commentaries of the earliest jurists in the earliest centuries of Islam to the same level as the word of God. For them, to question those laws and their underlying interpretations is to question the word of God and thus to doubt the infallibility of God and the perfection of the message. This belief is then used to silence any dissent, any questioning of the interpretation of the religion as propagated by the religious authorities, any calls for reform.

As Muslims and as believers, we want to be true to our faith; we want to find liberation from within our own religion. Today's women will not be cowed into silence anymore. They are more convinced than ever that it was not Allah's intention to keep them submissive, inferior, or silent just because they are women. It is this conviction in an Islam that is just that gives us the courage to stand up to reclaim our religion and to claim for ourselves the democratic space to speak out against all kinds of injustice.

**4.** ***The belief that only the*** **ulama** ***have the right to talk and decide on matters of religion.*** Very few Muslims not traditionally educated in religion have the courage to question or even discuss Islam in public. They have been socialized to accept that those in religious authority know best what is Islamic and what is not. Many fear that if they were to express an opinion that differs from the established orthodox view, they would be accused of being an apostate, of being against Islam, or of having deviated from their faith. This is the common experience of individuals and groups pushing for reform in many parts of the Muslim world.

Because of such fears, policy-making on matters of religion has largely become the exclusive preserve of religious scholars, the *ulama*. This has led to alarming and undemocratic developments in countries where reli-

gion is a part of public life. In the case of the *Shariah* Criminal Offenses laws, their drafting and adoption by the state legislative assemblies and parliament in Malaysia without public knowledge or any public discussion reflect the obsessive belief that religion is a sensitive matter and should just be left to the *ulama*. They know best. Government officials dare not touch issues of substantive law in handling legal drafts submitted by the religious authorities.

This implicit trust in, and fear of, the religious authorities raises two critical issues. First, fear and ignorance on matters of religion among government officials and politicians can lead to a serious dereliction of duty by all other arms of government responsible for law-making, thus allowing the adoption of laws that not only violate the constitution, but have no historical precedent in Islam. The government in effect has delegated total responsibility for the interpretation and implementation of Islam to a tiny minority whose views and values are often contrary to the vision of Islam held by the federal leadership and by the silent majority of Malaysians.

Second, in a democratic society like Malaysia, can Islamic laws be made without going through the whole democratic process of law-making? There is a belief among those in religious authority that matters of religion should not be debated in the legislative assemblies by elected representatives who have not been traditionally educated in Islam and by those who lead less than pious lives—and certainly not by non-Muslims. Neither should it be open to public discussion as they genuinely believe that they in all their wisdom and knowledge know best what is Islamic and what is not. It is this belief that led them to promulgate a law that provides for religious declarations (*fatwa)* to have the automatic force of law and to make it a crime to challenge or violate them.

In a democratic country, however, the law-making process cannot be delegated to an exclusive group of people who are not democratically elected, who sit in a closed body, and who do not believe that others have a right to discuss or debate matters of religion. In a democracy, the government and the religious authorities cannot remove law-making and policy-making on Islamic matters from the public domain just because it is religion. This violates fundamental democratic principles.

Those in religious authority in fast modernizing countries like Malaysia must begin to understand that they operate in a democratic multiethnic society where fundamental liberties are protected by the federal constitution, where political leaders are answerable to the electorate, and where citizens are better educated and better informed on Islam's eternal values of justice, equality, freedom, and virtue. Such citizens are no longer

willing to be cowed into silence in the face of injustice, extremism, and overzealousness committed in the name of religion. Many of those who challenge the rights of women's groups to offer alternative views on Islam do not themselves read Arabic and have not been traditionally educated in Islam. *Their* right to speak out, however, is not questioned.

The attacks and condemnations by Islamist groups and individuals against those who challenge the mainstream orthodox views are twofold. First, they undermine the legitimacy of the women's groups to speak on Islam by accusing us of having deviated from our faith. They accuse us of locating our arguments on an incorrect and unsystematic methodology of interpretation of the Qur'an. They also accuse us of using our brains and logic and reason (*akal*) instead of referring to classical exegetical and jurisprudential texts.

Second, they contend that it is dangerous to offer alternative opinions and interpretations of the religion as this could confuse the religious community (*ummat*). Alternative views that differ from the mainstream views are an insult to the Qur'an, inculcate hatred against *shariah*, and degrade women, they assert.

Such views disregard the historical context within which the *shariah* was constructed and the historical character of the *shariah* itself as it was developed and applied in early and classical Islamic civilization. What needs to be challenged here is the claim by such Islamist forces that only their perspective and interpretation of Islam, of its values and its view of human and women's rights, are the "universal" and legitimate view for all Muslims. This claim of universality needs to be negotiated and challenged within the Muslim worldwide *ummat* (Othman 1997).

While all Muslims accept that the Qur'an is one, the human effort in interpreting the Qur'an had always led to diverse opinions. It is precisely because of this diversity that Islam has survived to this day in different cultures and societies—all could accommodate the universal message of Islam. How can a modernizing democratic society search for solutions to the multitude of problems facing the *ummat* when that search is conducted in ways that are so exclusive, intimidating, and sometimes even life-threatening? The world is far more complex today than it ever has been. No one group can have the exclusive monopoly on knowledge. In a modern democratic nation-state, then, independent reason (*ijtihad*) must be exercised in concert and through democratic engagement with the *ummat*. The experience of others who have been traditionally excluded from the process of interpreting and implementing Islam must be included. The role of women, who constitute half of the *ummat*, must be acknowledged in this process of policy- and law-making.

## Conclusion

In a public lecture some time ago, Professor Fathi Osman said that the application of independent reason (*ijtihad*) cannot remain just an exercise in linguistics gymnastics by an exclusive group of people who not only isolate the text from the socio-historical context in which it was revealed, but also isolate that text from the context of the contemporary society we live in today.[20] The government of Malaysia, in its policies on Islamization, must show the political will and the moral courage to direct the kind of Islam that must evolve in a complex and modernizing society like Malaysia. More than any other Muslim country in the world, Malaysia has all the fundamentals, economic, social, and religious, to show how a society can be developed, modern, and democratic and still true to Islamic values and principles.

Malaysia is at an advantage for several reasons. The prime minister is long known for his commitment to reform and reconstruction of Islamic thought, culture, and society in order to deal with the challenges of modernization and change. We have adopted parliamentary democracy as our political system, its many flaws notwithstanding. We live in a country whose people historically have been open to change and to outside influences and fertilization of cultures and religions, and who today can confidently embrace the challenge of change, diversity, and pluralism. We have a government that at the policy level believes in equality between men and women. We live in a multiethnic and multireligious society; therefore the kind of Islam that evolves must necessarily take into consideration the rights of other citizens in a democratic state. We have a mainstream mass media that supports the push for a more enlightened Islam and provides women's groups the public space to articulate their grievances and alternative views. It is for these reasons that women's groups have achieved some measure of success in demanding recognition of their rights.

However, these democratizing structures and progressive voices are up against very powerful forces who in the name of religion deny the plurality and diversity of the Malaysian heritage and the democratic principles and liberties in which most Malaysians believe. If an Islamic state as conceptualized by such forces asserts different rather than equal rights for Muslim men, Muslim women, and non-Muslims, why would those whose equal status and rights are recognized by a democratic system support the creation of an Islamic state? If an Islamic state means an authoritarian theocratic political system committed to enforcing androcentric doctrines and silencing those who challenge its understanding of Islam, then why would those whose fundamental liberties are protected by a democratic state support an Islamic state?

These are real dilemmas that must be dealt with by those who want to create an Islamic state in multiethnic and multireligious democratic societies. If as believers we want to live a life according to the tenets of our faith, a simplistic call to return to an idealized golden age of Islam that has little bearing on the realities of today's world cannot be the answer. And yet the answers can be found within our faith—if only we have the intellectual vigor, the moral courage, and the political will to strive for an enlightened, plural, and progressive interpretation of the Qur'an in our search for answers to deal with our changing times and circumstances. This is not heretical, but an imperative if religion is to be relevant to our lives today.

## Notes

Earlier drafts of this essay were presented at the Australia-Malaysia Conference, Canberra, 1997, and the Roundtable on Islam, Culture and Democracy, Kuala Lumpur 1998.

1. Ed. note: *saw* is an abbreviation of an Arabic phrase that means, "May Allah bless Him and give Him peace," said after pronouncing the Prophet's name.

2. For a discussion of Sisters' work on equality, see Sisters in Islam, *Are Men and Women Equal Before Allah?* (Kuala Lumpur, 1991).

3. For example, the Qarmations who challenged Abbasid rule also departed from the norms and values of the existing social order. Qarmatian women were not veiled, polygamy was outlawed, and men and women socialized together. See Ahmed 1992, 99.

4. Othman 1997, quoting M. B. Hooker and Wazir Karim.

5. Interviews with Professor Mehrun Siraj, former dean of the Law Faculty, University of Malaya, and Salbiah Ahmad, a former student and later colleague of Professor Ahmad Ibrahim at the International Islamic University.

6. Interview with Datuk Dr. Pathmanaban, former deputy minister of health.

7. For an understanding of the radicalization of the Islamic movement in Malaysia in the 1970s and 1980s through the influence of Middle Eastern and Pakistani Islamic groups, see Anwar 1987.

8. See Sisters in Islam memorandum on the Shariah Criminal Code (II) 1993 [State of Kelantan], submitted to the prime minister, Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, December 1993, in Ismail, 1995.

9. In the campaign for the Domestic Violence Act (DVA), Sisters in Islam worked in the Joint Action Group on DVA that included feminist-based women's groups such as Women's Aid Organisation, Women's Crisis Centre, and the Association of Women Lawyers.

10. See SIS letter to the editor, published in *The Star,* March 18, 1996.

11. For example, statistics from the *shariah* courts in Selangor showed that in 1995, the courts granted permission for polygamy in only 82 cases. However, 350 cases of illegal polygamous marriages were recorded. By September 1996, this number had increased to 410.

12. Interview with the late Professor Ahmad Ibrahim.

13. See Mohamad 1996.

14. According to the Islamic Family Law (Federal Territories) Act of 1984, a wife is said to be *nusyuz* if she unreasonably refuses to obey the lawful wishes or commands of her husband, that is, inter alia: when she withholds her association with her husband; when she leaves her husband's home against his will; or when she refuses to move with him to another home or place.

15. See Mohamad 1996.

16. For a full argument challenging these provisions in law, see Sisters in Islam memorandum to the prime minister submitted on August 8, 1997. Sisters in Islam, P.O. Box 8334, Kelana Jaya Post Office, 46787, Selangor, Malaysa.

17. It was during this period in 1982 that UMNO co-opted Anwar Ibrahim, the leader of the Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM), in a stunning political coup that distressed his supporters in the burgeoning Islamic student movement and PAS members who saw him as a potential candidate for president. Anwar's meteoric rise up the political ladder eventually saw him elected as UMNO deputy president in 1994 and consequently appointed deputy prime minister. His sacking in 1998 was equally stunning.

18. A woman who complained that her husband of sixteen years was hot-tempered and often beat her and accused her of infidelity while he was having an affair with another woman was chided by Dr. Amran Kasimin, who runs a weekly religious advice column, on the overriding importance of the wife's obedience to her husband. He quoted six hadith to prove his point, such as hell is full of women because they have been disobedient to their husbands, that even if a wife might have licked the pus that covered her husband from head to toe, she still would not have done enough to repay his good deeds towards her. See *Mingguan Malaysia*, November 7, 1999.

19. For a fuller development of this argument, see Osman 1994.

20. Sisters in Islam Public Lecture Series by Dr. Fathi Osman on Islam and Modernity, 1995.

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# 10

# Gender and Pluralism in Indonesia

*Siti Ruhaini Dzuhayatin*

This essay focuses on the relation between gender and pluralism in Indonesia. I begin by discussing how gender can be situated in the discourse of pluralism. Then I use this theoretical framework to examine how and why gender identity has been used as a political construction rather than merely something natural or cultural under Suharto's New Order regime (1966–1998). Finally, I examine the possibility of movement toward more diverse or pluralistic representations of gender assignment under the changing political atmosphere made possible by the post-Suharto, reformation movement.

## Gender and Pluralism

Pluralism is the concept commonly used to identify social diversity or social stratification in a society. It refers to, among other things, the multiplicity of worldviews, ethnicities, religions, roles, and people in a society (Chopp 1986, 35). It encompasses the so-called otherness and difference of both practical life and its philosophical representations. It has been a long cultural struggle for human beings to come to a stage where many now recognize that pluralistic diversity is a basic fact of human existence that must be recognized and accommodated for any social order to be just. Human history has witnessed long periods characterized by monolithic worldviews based on simple categories opposing "we" or "us" to "them." Inevitably, too, these differences were structured hierarchically with the "we" as the superior and the "they" as the inferior. As Edward Said (1991)

has demonstrated, monolithic and hierarchical worldviews like these have been used to justify the physical colonization and cultural domination of one people or group against another. Assertions of anti-pluralistic values contradict the modern democratic attitudes embodied in fundamental human rights and liberties (Amaladoss 1991, 15).

In the modern world, pluralism should exist hand in hand with what we might call a practical philosophical relativism based on the belief that citizens in society can never achieve an absolute agreement on the underlying unity or uniformity of reality. Philosophically, Chopp notes (1986, 36), relativism in this limited sense involves a certain caution as regards the concepts we use to comprehend reality, such as natural rights and other conceptual schemes, on the grounds that these ideas are themselves culturally conditioned. A common challenge to pluralist understandings is that authorities in society assert the dominance of their interpretation of reality, and do so in a way that violates or contradicts the praxis and life experience of other people. A pluralistic attitude that recognizes the inevitable diversity of understandings provides more possibilities for growth and enrichment in religious, political, and even personal spheres. It also opens up new possibilities for democratic action, reflection, and transformation (Habermas 1971).

It is only recently that gender has come to be considered as part of the problem of pluralism. Social theorists, especially women, have come to insist that gender, too, be acknowledged as a specific and culturally variable or relativistic category. This demand has, of course, challenged gender categories which assert that relations between the sexes must be timeless and unchanging because they are based on some essential difference (Young 1994, 713). Biological differences are often taken to be the grounds for classifying men and women as immutably different. In this manner, in most cultures, women as a group have been defined in "contrast or in binary opposition to men" (Kedourie 1993, 26). This binary opposition is in turn used to justify widely different socialization practices for men and women, leaving them with very different life experiences and opportunities. To include gender in the discourse of pluralism, therefore, is to acknowledge that gender can be constructed according to different representations. It is also to acknowledge that, contrary to Furnivall's (1944) classic discussion of plural societies, variation in gender ideals and practices is a key feature of modern pluralism and, as such, must figure in any effort to devise a civil and democratic charter for modern political life.

In patriarchal cultures men tend to dominate the macro-structure of power and, with it, cultural ideology. Pyke defines cultural ideology as nor-

mative attitudes about appropriate power relations (Pyke 1996, 527). This cultural ideology acts as the mediator between the macro-structure of power and the micro-practice of interpersonal relations. Furthermore, domination by a political macro-structure gives rise to discourses of truth and knowledge that serve the interests of the powerful. In the context of patriarchal gender relations, men as the dominant group may be able to control the thoughts and the desires of women as the subordinates. The control may not necessarily be directly coercive, but may be hegemonic (Gramsci 1971). For Gramsci, ideology is hegemonic when three characteristics exist. First, the interests of the powerful are accepted as being in everybody's own best interest. Second, the ideology becomes naturalized and "taken for granted as the way things are and should be" (Pyke 1996, 529). Third, in order to create the social cohesion necessary to secure the position of the dominant, subordinate groups have to be socialized to ignore their interests when they contradict those of the dominant. The ideological hegemony becomes taken for granted and unconscious. In the case of gender, it is reflected in the way that the majority of women perceive their self-representation and their social roles as natural and the only way things can be.

## State and Gender Identity in Indonesia: An Historical Analysis

Some years ago Maila Stivens (1991) raised a very intriguing question as to "why gender matters in South East Asian Politics?" Her question attempts to throw light on the way in which gender constructions in Indonesia are not merely cultural but political as well. They are political in the sense that the nation-building process as developed under Suharto depended not merely on economic growth or maintaining the country's political independence but on teaching citizens to keep to their restrictive roles and positions. We repeatedly heard in the official speeches and documents of bureaucrats under the Suharto regime that nation-building and "development" (*pembangunan*) are long processes that require the seamless coordination of all components of the nation. Dissidence and opposition were not allowed. Drawing on a corporatist ideology of cooperation and control, this ideological model asserted that prosperity and social justice will only be achieved if each component of the whole system plays its role accordingly. Any change in the position of one component will affect the others and will eventually lead to tension and disintegration.

The question we can then ask is, What were the parameters for gender roles and identity in this formula? And what are the implications of such a repressively controlled assignment for men's and women's self-determination?

To begin to answer these questions we have to retrace the process by which modern Indonesian culture was established. As Ryadi Gunawan (1993) has argued, in the early years of the Indonesian national awakening, there was a deep cultural tension over the terms and design of the nation. The tension pitted secular Javanese against non-Javanese, especially religiously oriented Muslim nationalists from Sumatra. The appointment of Sukarno as first president of the republic marked the victory of secular nationalist values and paved the way for the dominance of Javanese symbols at the national level. This success also affected the idioms used for articulating gender identities in the new nation.

For example, from early on the Javanese word *wanita* (woman) began to be widely used to refer to women rather than the term *perempuan* from Malay. The change in expression was not without consequences as far as women's roles are concerned. *Perempuan* reflects a more dynamic and strong notion of womanhood as manifested by the prominent Malay women leaders in Malayo-Indonesian history like Sultanah Syafinatuddin, Commander Malahayati, Cut Nya' Din, Cut Mutia, and Rasuna Syaid. By contrast, *wanita* connotes a style of "ladylike" or refined and reserved female behavior. Not only is the emphasis on refinement, but the refinement is of a type that had only existed in the Javanese upper class (Murniati 1992, 24).

Traditional Javanese society consisted of three social layers: the upper class or aristocratic circle (*ningrat*), the middle class (*priyayi*), and the lower classes (*wong cilik*). Any discussion of gender roles has to be located in this structure. In the past, the social layers were stratified genealogically, religiously, and economically. Genealogically, the *ningrat* aristocrats were those who were able to trace their family trees to Javanese kings. The *wong cilik* (lit., "little people") were those who did not have the privilege of the *ningrat*, consisting mostly of farmers, fishermen, or small traders. Between the two groups there was the *priyayi* (middle-level group, especially those active in government bureaucracy), which included the descendants of regional authority (*bupati*) of the colonial government and those who had been given access to the colonial schools. In addition to these three main groupings, there were smaller social groups that were highly honored by the people even though their numbers were small, including traditional Muslim scholars (*kyai*) recognized for their religious competence and merchants active in the marketplace (*juragan*).

Javanese culture accords women significant influence in a few spheres, such as, most notably, the marketplace (see Alexander 1998). Nonetheless, the culture is generally patriarchal in the sense that men are given the privilege of being the ultimate authority over the rest of the family, and more important, over the women of the household. Women in peasant and poor families pay vague homage to patriarchal idioms but then go on to exercise considerable influence in the "non-ideological" or practical management of the family (Geertz 1961). However, the division of gender roles was, and still is, far more rigid in *ningrat* and *priyayi* families, where women were required to be the loyal backstop to their husbands. In these families, one often heard reference to a cultural maxim drawn from Javanese versions of the Hindu epics, which stated that "wives must follow their husband either to heaven or to hell" (*Swargo manut neraka katut*)—illustrating the subservient position of women (Kuntowijoyo 1993, 131).

The position of the patriarch in Javanese families was then reinforced by the Dutch-introduced concept of the man as the breadwinner for the family. Just as the Dutch introduced a certain rigidity into ethnic relations in colonial society (see the introduction to this volume), they did so in representations of gender. As men and not women were recruited into the Dutch bureaucracy, the separation between the productive and reproductive domains in the household became all the stronger. According to this view, men's primary role is to engage in the productive activities in the public domain. Women, on the other hand, are assigned to a domestic role, raising children and providing comfort for their husbands at home.

A similar domestication of women's roles was found in traditional Islamic circles. Much as Zainah Anwar's essay in this book shows for conservative Islamist thought in Malaysia, in these circles women's subordinate position was justified by the male-biased interpretations of Islam teachings. Throughout most of history, women were not given the full right to study Islamic texts. As a result, they were not able to critically challenge existing interpretations of the tradition. It is only recently that women have been given access to Islamic studies. The result is obviously liberating for women, since they have been able to show that many readings of the tradition are informed by a "prior text," that is, the male reader's own perspective, circumstances, and background (Muhsin 1992, 5).

The misuse of religious interpretations caused women great suffering. Women's difficulties were well-documented by the famous female heroine of early-twentieth-century Indonesia (herself from an aristocratic background), R. A. Kartini, in her widely read writings (1879–1904):

> And you could imagine what a hell pain a woman must suffer when her husband comes home with another—a rival—whom she must recognize as his legal wife? He could torture her into death, act as he will . . . everything for men and nothing for women, is our law and custom.
>
> Oh cruelty! Under the protection of Mohammedan teaching and fed by the ignorance of *women*, the victim! Oh ! And to think that destiny may impose that gruesome injustice called polygamy on me. (Symmers 1964, 42)

In contrast to these attitudes, Kuntowijoyo (1993, 131; see also Alexander 1998) notes that gender relations among the *juragan* merchants (many of whom, it should be noted, came from more pious Muslim backgrounds than did court officials) were more flexible, open, and egalitarian. This is best seen in the fact that both sexes had access to productive activities. Home-based industries such as batik printings, gold and silver smithing, and others were commonly conducted in the neighborhood or household, enabling wives and the whole family to participate. Kuntowijoyo further observes that in Surakarta and Yogyakarta women played especially significant roles in the production and marketing process. Even today one can see that the central markets of these two cities are dominated by female merchants managing their businesses worth millions of *rupiah* per day. Husbands usually often act as advisers when needed, but otherwise dedicate themselves to work in a separate sphere, such as government or religious organizations.

Among the three layers of Javanese society discussed above, the *priyayi* or bureaucratic middle class had the greatest access to strategic positions in the period of national awakening prior to independence. Their greater access to Western education, in particular, enabled them to play a prominent role in political movements. The appointment of Sukarno to the presidency of the new nation in turn allowed the Javanese *priyayi* tradition to become the dominant culture of state, influencing everything from bureaucratic policies to family affairs. In this manner, the *priyayi* ideals of women as dedicated housewives became the ideal type for Indonesian women as a whole.

The great irony here is that the concept of woman as housewife and no more had only been introduced in the archipelago in the nineteenth century by Dutch colonialists. The concept was related to *priyayi* women's economic dependency upon their husbands' salary, a dependency that became particularly widespread during the so-called Ethical Policy at the end of the nineteenth century, when large numbers of indigenous men were recruited into the bureaucracy. It was this recruitment that provided

the model for the hegemony of men's careers over women's. The hegemony was promoted by the colonial government itself, to free men from the household responsibilities that hampered their productivity in public affairs. With the help of Christian missionaries, in turn, the colonial regime provided schools in which young mothers and girls were prepared to play their role as future housewives. Kumari Jayawardena's research shows similar patterns about role expectations of women in other colonial countries:

> The content and the nature of women's education reflected the ambiguities inherent in the new concept of woman. The missionaries had been primarily concerned with producing Christian wives and the mothers for the new-male converts in order to prevent the latter from lapsing into their former beliefs. (1986, 16)

The Muslim community's response to these changes was to establish their own schools. Mua'limat was the first school for girls which was established by Muhammadiyah in Yogyakarta shortly after that organization's founding in 1912 (Shihab 1998b, 116). Attitudes similar to those conveyed in missionary schools were often inculcated, in part as a strategy to strengthen the *ummat* (community of believers) against Christian proselytization. The Mua'limat curriculum sought to blend instruction in so-called women's skills with Islamic teachings. Since the Islamic literatures used in the curriculum were exclusively written by male scholars, a male bias was inevitable. The interpretations were, in addition, made to conform to the Western concept of housewife adapted by the school.

Nowadays, when the threat of Christian proselytization is no longer a primary concern, the curriculum in religious schools has been expanded to include subjects required for further study in Islamic universities. Nonetheless, gender issues related to notions of masculinity and femininity, appropriate gender relations, and the division of labor are still presented in what is the largely conservative framework of Islamic textual traditions. A hidden curriculum reflecting the instructors' cultural biases conveys the message that gender inequality is something natural and inevitable. It is "natural" that men are responsible for supporting the family and women are limited to performing household duties.

Islamic studies at the university level shows a similar pattern of conservatism due to instructors' reluctance to adopt modern methodology in approaching current issues, including gender issues. The social impact of the conservatism of the Islamic educational system is particularly striking and unfortunate. The Islamic universities that produce Muslim scholars will, in turn, shape their students' future social awareness through their

roles as religious teachers, scholars, and judges. This process is in line with Gramsci's notion of hegemonic ideology when the Islamic graduates come to monopolize the teachings, which are internalized and accepted as the way things are and should forever be.

## The Male Career and *Ibuism* in the New Order

The above understanding became the theological ground for contemporary official gender ideals, and this in turn was adopted to reinforce ideological notions concerning male careers in the bureaucracy under the Suharto regime. The emergence of elite Javanese culture as the ideological macro-structure of Suharto's New Order created a homogeneous and hegemonic image of womanhood. The cultural expression of this ideal is that of married women who tirelessly dedicate their lives to their husbands and children. The success of the husband's career and the enhancement of children's education define the parameters of the wife's role.

Besides controlling the military as his power base, Suharto also required government officials to become members of the ruling party known as Golongan Karya or Golkar. With the party came a program known as Pancasila Moral Education (P4), through which the state sought to impose its hegemonic views on everything from the presidency to the status of women and wives. Those who refused to be certified as having passed the training program experienced difficulties in getting access to government services; worse yet, they could be branded a leftist or communist. In these programs the Suharto regime inculcated citizenship ideals premised on the restrictive gender ideals of a male's role as public and a woman's as domestic. In addition to these hegemonic programs, the New Order responded to events like the international "decade of the women" in the 1970s by launching programs in which they celebrated women's achievements—as long as these did not take women beyond their "natural" roles as housewives. By preserving the primary role of women as housewives the state could control them through their husbands, who were in turn controlled through their public activities by the state. Through such a policy, the regime was able to limit women's participation in public life without the use of direct coercion or physical restrictions.

As has been emphasized by many researchers, the New Order regime identifies the status of women through their roles as housewives, a relationship that Julia Surya Kusuma (1996) describes as the ideology of "motherism" or *ibuism*. Women have been regarded as the critical agent

of the family and the family itself is seen as the fundamental social institution of the state (Stivens 1991, 5). Women's roles are, therefore, of significant political importance and are supposed to be defined according to official canons. In 1978, the government formulated this ideal type of woman in its outline for State General Guidance (related to Indonesia's five-year development plan). Women are important, this document said,

1. As loyal supporters of husbands
2. Producers and educators of future generations
3. Caretakers of the household
4. Additional economic providers for the family
5. Members of society

In order to conform even better to this ideal type, women were enjoined to join two organizations created by the state: Dharma Wanita (lit., "Women's Good Work") or the PKK (Association for Households and Families). The wives of civil servants were automatically drafted into the Dharma Wanita whenever their husbands assumed office. Recruitment into the PKK was organized at the village and neighborhood level. Women's positions in both organizations were organized hierarchically and patriarchally, with each individual woman assuming a rank commensurate with the status of her husband.

The state reinforced its ideals of domesticated femininity through other mechanisms as well, such as contests in which local authorities selected "model mothers" (*ibu teladan*). The criteria used in this selection were consistent with those described above: a model woman was one measured in terms of her success in supporting her husband's career and her children's success in education. Women's achievements in public life were never viewed as consistent with the model mother role unless balanced by the good career of the husband and the education of the children. Under no circumstances could the wife's public role be higher than that of the husband. More objectionable yet would be a situation when a successful woman remained single or became a single mother. Attitudes like these did not change substantially over the course of the New Order, even though in the mid-1990s the state launched a new policy of "parallel partnership" (*kemitra sejajaran*) between men and women.

The officialized notion of the "model mother" represents what Pyke has called a homogeneous representation, in this instance one imposed on women by the central elite. The representation idealizes the married woman in a nuclear family with two children, preferably a boy and girl, economically self-sufficient, maintaining a religious environment at home,

and never having a career more illustrious than her husband's. This representation does little justice to the pluralistic nature of women and women's roles in society. But it was reinforced nonetheless, not only by state-based organizations like Dharma Wanita and the PKK, but also by religious organizations like Aisiyah and Muslimat, the women's wing of Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul Ulama respectively (Douglass 1980, 153). Conversely, if a woman becomes active in independent organizations or non-governmental organizations she would likely face public accusations of being "radical."

In the early 1990s, the New Order regime regularly accused independent NGOs, including women's organizations, of being agents of left-wing ideas and movements. Some such activists were arrested on charges of acting against the national ideology or Pancasila. In 1995, a group of women were arrested when they held a demonstration in the graveyard of the national heroine, Kartini, demanding the abolition of the state's corporatist women's organizations, the Dharma Wanita and PKK. The religious elite have also dismissed alternative interpretations of Islamic teaching related to women, as initiated, for example, by women activists who question the very concept of women's position in Islam. In short, the gender representations imposed by the state have generated discrimination against women who are unwilling to conform to their criteria. The discrimination takes place not only within the state but in society too, showing that New Order cultural controls extended deep into civil society.

The new concept of women that has been introduced by Muslim women activists challenges the prevalent and homogeneous representation of women as merely housewives. Much as Zainah Anwar shows in her essay on Malaysia, within this new perspective, women assert the right to reinterpret Islamic teaching in a manner advantageous to their social and religious roles. There are, however, few religious sanctions in the primary commentaries of Islam that openly support divorced, unmarried, and childless women. This patriarchal bias in the Islamic commentaries obscures the equal rights of men and women accorded by Islam in the Qur'an and hadith. But the promotion of views like these often meets with difficulties in Muslim circles, not least of all when women scholars are accused of being influenced by Western feminism rather than Islam.

## The Hegemony of Male Views

The dominance of masculine career ideals also influences women's attitudes toward politics. To assess this influence, I conducted a small survey circulating questionnaires to twenty-eight respondents in a neighborhood

outside Yogyakarta in south-central Java. I then followed up the survey with interviews with nine women in the neighborhood, all from different economic and educational backgrounds. I was able to get responses from only nineteen of the twenty-eight women to whom I gave the questionnaires. The most common reason for those who refused to fill out the questionnaires was that they were not interested in discussing politics.

The survey was intended to explore how education and economic status influence the interpersonal relations and political views of men and women. I carried out the survey in the weeks leading up to the first general election following the collapse of the New Order, in June 1999. Forty-eight political parties participated in the election. I was particularly interested in understanding how much husbands' political opinions affected their wives. My survey focused on four issues related to the political choices of women.

The first point concerned whether the husband or the wife is the more influential figure in the decision making that leads up to voting. In responding to questions on this issue, 80 percent of the interviewees said their husband's views strongly influenced their own; answers to this question did not vary significantly according to the educational level of the women. Twenty percent of the respondents said their voting choices were influenced by sons or close friends. The most interesting result to emerge from these responses is that there was no substantial difference between the wives of civil servants who are the target of the government propaganda on gender and those whose husbands work in the private sector.

The second question with which the survey was concerned was, Do women ever discuss political issues with their husbands? Sixty percent of the respondents who had graduated from university and have their own careers had discussed their choice of party with their husbands. The remainder tended to make their decision on the basis of their husband's choice or their son's in the absence of a husband. None of the discussants consulted with their daughters in making their voting decisions. Most respondents insisted that their husbands never explicitly dictated what party to vote for. Instead they said they learn of their husband's preferences through his informal conversations with male friends or through his comments about news heard on the television.

The third question posed in the interviews concerned the propriety of husbands and wives having different political viewpoints. The majority of respondents did not explicitly object to the possibility of wives voting for a different party than their husbands. In actual interviews, however, the majority of respondents nonetheless stated clearly that wives should ideally vote for the same party as their husbands because husbands are the head of the household. This notion was also the majority view among

women with a higher education. Finally, and consistent with the above findings, only 10 percent of the respondents considered it proper that women should involve themselves in politics; the rest indicated they regarded politics as a male domain. They disapproved of the idea of a party led by and for women.

The last point discussed in the interviews concerned whether women ever review the platform of the party they chose to support. Only two of nineteen women answered "yes"; the remainder said that they never sought out any information about the platform of the party or parties in which they were interested. In later, face-to-face interviews I asked whether women's issues ever become a primary concern for women when they choose to support a particular party. Only two respondents confidently answered "yes"; the others responded ambiguously, saying that they did not know exactly.

The clear impression I received from these unstructured interviews is that ordinary women, even those with relatively high levels of education, are still reluctant to talk about or engage in politics. One suspects here that the control mechanisms introduced by the New Order regime still exercise influence over women's perceptions.

## Toward a Pluralistic Model of Gender Relations

A pluralistic approach to gender is one that acknowledges the multiplicity of self-presentations and expectations possible on the basis of sex. In the New Order era women had been instructed to accept a single ideal type of femininity and masculinity constructed by and for the regime. This ideal was based on a homogeneous and restrictive representation of women's roles and identity. This ideology served to restrict women's ability to articulate their cultural and strategic needs. For more than three decades it continued like this, with women being made the passive targets of regime efforts at legitimacy and control. Women faced a dilemma as to how to balance their desire to engage in public life with the restrictive, "natural" role assigned them by the state.

The reformation movement that has emerged in the aftermath of the Suharto regime provides a new opportunity for women to review these restrictive social and political assignments. In these new circumstances, it is hoped that women will be given the freedom to choose self-representations consistent with their own circumstances without any social stigma. In so doing, women can and should come together to oppose or, at the very least, critically question their roles in two of the New Order regime's

subsidiary organizations: Dharma Wanita and PKK. As an alternative to these regime vehicles, we can only hope that women will be given the opportunity to freely choose their own political affiliations.

The democracy to which we all aspire requires that we eradicate the elite Javanese *priyayi* attitudes that allowed the elite to exercise excessive power over women. Since the elite gained additional legitimacy from conservative religious teachings, a key feature of this effort must also be that women be trained to develop and present progressive interpretations of their religious traditions favorable not to just one but to both sexes. The acknowledgment of women's perspectives in dealing with all aspects of life is an integral part of democracy and an inclusively plural society.

Such an effort to revisit and revise received ideas of male and female has already been initiated by various women NGOs in an effort to provide women with more choices in expressing their interests. One of the most prominent women's NGOs in Yogyakarta is the Rifka Annisa Women's Crisis Center (see Mohtar et al.'s essay on Yogyakarta in the present book). This center pioneered the campaign against domestic violence—acts that had been hidden from critical scrutiny under the state's homogenizing jargon of "womanism" or *ibuism*. The center also encourages women to come and to speak openly about their marriage problems, in a manner that would have previously been regarded as culturally inappropriate. Women are also assisted psychologically, legally, and (equally important) theologically in confronting the challenges of divorce and single parenthood.

In creating a progressive understanding of women roles, Rifka Annisa (Rifka Media 1998) has made use of leaflets, flyers, seminars, public education, and networking with other national and international NGOs. All this is important for promoting alternatives to the ideal of the "model woman" promoted by the New Order. Being married or single, willing to have or not to have children, choosing a career or being housewives are all issues that should be resolved on the basis of women's own choices. No one has the right to interfere in these decisions. Not even the husband or the state has the right to assert control over a woman's body or mind. For a pluralistic approach to gender to take hold, women must finally be allowed the right to choose heterogeneous expressions of their selves.

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# 11

# Mirroring the Past or Reflecting the Future?

## Class and Religious Pluralism in Indonesian Labor

*Vedi R. Hadiz*

The unraveling of Suharto's New Order was accompanied by the flare-up of ethnic and religious violence across Indonesia, giving rise to fresh questions about its future as a viable nation.[1] Fears of impending chaos, anarchy, and national disintegration are of course also being fueled by the independence of east Timor and separatist sentiment not only in west Papua and Aceh, but in such heretofore untroubled places as Riau. On another level, the establishment of political and social organizations overtly premised on ethnic and religious allegiances is giving rise to fears about the reemergence of old political divides, especially those of ethnicity, religion, and ideology known a generation ago as *aliran* (lit., "stream").[2] At the same time, the renewed salience of local politics is reflective of the decline of central state authority, and provides fertile ground for the resurfacing of long-suppressed animosities. Whether assisted by elite manipulation or not (see Sulistyo and Hefner in this book), these incidents often involve political gangsterism and thuggery. This essay deals with the narrower issue of how pluralist developments such as these may impact Indonesia's fledgling labor movement and the organization of urban industrial workers.

Labor organizing is of course greatly facilitated when some degree of working class solidarity emerges out of common circumstances, experiences, and struggles (Thompson 1968). A sense of class identity or aware-

ness is useful to labor organizing, even as ethnic, religious, and regional ties no doubt continue to help shape the perceptions and worldviews of individual workers (Athreya 1990). Against this backdrop, questions may arise about the inter-relationship between class identity and ethnoreligious and regional identities, especially as they relate to modes of labor struggle and organization in a time of deep economic and political crisis.

Significantly, recent labor developments have already included the establishment of ostensibly "Islamic" labor organizations by political activists connected in one way or another to the Suharto and Habibie governments. Does this facilitate the mobilization of workers through new organizing vehicles replete with ready-made and potentially potent rallying symbols, as claimed by its initiators? Or is it an elite effort to preempt a potentially uncontrollable—though still largely ineffective—independent labor movement by encouraging fragmentation along religious lines?

In light of the much reported tension between Christians and Muslims in Indonesia in recent times, labor organizing in the 1990s displayed a remarkable absence of inter-religious hostility among workers and activists. It is well known, for example, that NGOs led by Protestant or Catholic organizers have been prominent in labor organizing in manufacturing, in spite of the fact that the industrial labor force is predominantly Muslim.[3] Fragmentation in the labor movement, while in part reflecting different strategies and political dispositions among leaders (Hadiz 1997), has equally had to do with petty rivalries between NGOs jealously guarding their turf, rather than religious divides as such. Significantly, these rivalries have given rise to discussions among labor activists about the need to reduce the role of NGOs in the labor movement.[4]

How likely is it, then, that organizing along *aliran*—and especially religious—lines will become common in the labor movement, especially following the implosion of the state-backed union, the FSPSI,[5] constituted under Suharto's New Order? Do recent developments anticipate a return to the labor movement of the 1950s characterized by cleavages along *aliran* lines, as hinted by the recent formation of Islamic-, Protestant-, and Catholic-based political parties? In pre–New Order Indonesia the major political parties frequently had close ties to particular labor federations and utilized many of them as vehicles to garner votes. Has labor now reemerged as a significant enough force to be co-opted by elites currently contesting the process of economic and political reconstruction in Indonesia?

I argue here that the recent establishment of religiously oriented labor unions has partly to do with the development of new strategies of selective mass mobilization by sections of the Indonesian state elite. Selective mass mobilizations will likely play an ever more important role in these

volatile times, targeting the urban and rural poor hard hit by the economic crisis. Accompanying this strategy is the increasing prevalence of Thai-style money politics and the rising prominence of political gangsterism and thuggery.[6] The implication is that labor is not being given greater access to state power through this co-optation, but is being included in this strategy of selective mass mobilization as part of the wider contest to reconfigure political power after Suharto. The significance of this development is discussed below in relation to future political trends, but especially in relation to tendencies toward the development of a new political format characterized by greater electoralism and decentralization of power, within which national and local elites seek to reconstitute their power. Prominent within this format will likely be contending variations of nationalist and populist ideologies with statist tendencies.

## Between Class and Religion: Historical and Political Legacies

The most well-organized labor vehicle in pre–New Order Indonesia was SOBSI,[7] a federation closely linked with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and, therefore, crushed along with the latter's violent elimination from the political scene in 1965–1966. Its main rivals in the 1950s and early 1960s included such organizations as the SBII, later known as GASBIINDO,[8] the SARBUMUSI,[9] the KBKI,[10] and the KBSI,[11] each of which were in turn directly or indirectly linked to rival political parties.[12]

These represented just a handful of the labor organizations that existed in the 1950s, which included Muslim, Catholic, and Protestant unions, along with socialist and nationalist ones. Most owed their stature to the political parties to which they were linked for ideological orientation and patronage. This situation was in part reflective of the relatively undeveloped nature of labor as a class, in the wider context of the marked underdevelopment of Indonesian economy and society. The economy that existed in the early independence period was virtually unchanged from that inherited from late colonial times, marked as it was by the more or less continued predominance of the plantation sector, damaged by both war and chronic mismanagement, and a low level of industrialization. Hence, the PKI, which laid claim to some 20 million followers in its affiliated organizations, conceded that a modern industrial proletariat barely amounted to five-hundred thousand people (Aidit n.d., 61).[13]

Nevertheless, the euphoria of the recent independence struggle, in which workers' militias (*lasykar buruh*) had participated, the unconsoli-

dated nature of the postcolonial state, and the marked absence of any significant domestic bourgeoisie provided a context in which labor organizing could thrive. The egalitarian ethos of the revolutionary nationalist struggle—seen on the left as anti-capitalist as well as anti-imperialist—encouraged the development of radical and militant unions, especially those connected with SOBSI. Notwithstanding the quick growth of trade unionism in the 1950s, disproportionate to the size of the working class itself, accurately estimating the strength of trade unions was virtually impossible given their exorbitant claims. Hawkins considered the combined claim by trade unions in 1955 of a membership of almost 5.7 million workers to be utterly fantastic (Hawkins 1963a, 260–261).

There were always serious ideological cleavages in the pre–New Order labor movement. The major rivalry in the 1950s and 1960s was between SOBSI and various non-communist unions, especially those affiliated with Islamic political parties. The main area of dispute concerned the idea of "class struggle" which alienated most of the non-communist unions. Hawkins observed that the key difference between SOBSI and the Muslim unions, for example, was that the former stressed class struggle while the latter emphasized the principle of sharing wealth with the poor. He also noted that the Muslim unions sometimes refused to join in strikes and were considered less radical (Hawkins 1963b, 96).

SOBSI was notably more successful in securing leadership from the rank-and-file of workers than the other trade union federations. Moreover, it also tended to represent the more numerous less skilled workers;[14] non-communist unions, by contrast, tended to attract more skilled white-collar workers.[15] Their different constituencies, then, may in part explain the different political inclinations of SOBSI and of its non-communist rivals. SOBSI was also "helped" by the fact that it was linked to a party that was more or less "naturally" working class-oriented, while a rival like GASBIINDO was tied to a party (the modernist Muslim Masyumi) that more or less represented the urban petty bourgeoisie. The latter would have naturally felt threatened by the radical jargon employed by SOBSI.

Opposition to the idea of class struggle, however, was not confined to the Islamic-based unions. The Sentral Organisasi Buruh (SOB) Pantjasila union, linked to the Catholic political party, abided by the papal encyclicals *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and *Quadrogesimo Anno* (1931) on labor matters. These encouraged cooperation between workers and employers to overcome class divisions and conflict, in pursuit of the "common good." The organicist views of the Church on labor relations were presented as an alternative to those represented in liberalism, communism, and (Western) socialism (SOB Pantjasila 1960, 27–57; Bourchier 1996,

205–206). Influential in fascist Italy, this thinking found its way to the Catholic intellectuals that later coalesced around General Ali Moertopo, a key Suharto adviser and promoter of the "non-confrontational" labor doctrine known as Pancasila Industrial Relations (Moertopo 1975). Moertopo was the single most influential figure besides Suharto in the establishment of the organicist-inspired, state-dominated corporatist format that would govern state-society relations in the New Order.

Another important legacy of the 1950s and 1960s was growing military involvement in labor affairs. As early as 1950, regional military commanders had imposed restrictions on the right to strike in their respective jurisdictions. Later, as military personnel took up management positions in newly nationalized firms, they came in conflict with the militant stream of the labor movement associated with SOBSI/PKI. It was in this context that the military formed such organizations as the BKS-BUMIL,[16] aimed at forging cooperation between the armed forces and labor, and then even its own self-styled labor union, SOKSI.[17]

Many of the non-communist unions joined the military in combating SOBSI and the PKI, because they were also angered by SOBSI's influence and the PKI's continuing knack for coming out on top in major political changes—including the scrapping of the parliamentary system in 1958–1959. In 1960, the military nearly succeeded in co-sponsoring (with the minister of labor) the formation of one amalgamated state-backed union, although the effort floundered, largely due to SOBSI opposition.

Ironically, it was not just growing military involvement in labor affairs that stemmed the tide of labor militancy. In fact, the militancy of the SOBSI unions was checked by instruction of the PKI leadership, which in the early and mid-1960s lent support to Sukarno's ideas of a broad National Front and an alliance of NASAKOM (nationalist, religious, and communist) forces. Because of the alliance with Sukarno, strikes were discouraged and virtually disappeared in the last years of his rule (Hadiz 1997, 50). However, SOBSI's standing was not compromised as long as the PKI's star remained high. As a result, a stalemate between the military and militant labor prevailed until the bloody massacres that followed the events of September 30, 1965, paving the way for Suharto's New Order.

Founded by a coalition of forces led by the military, the New Order was premised on the destruction of the army's old foe, the PKI, a task that was accomplished with assistance from religious and urban middle-class mass organizations. Not surprisingly, the PKI's destruction after 1965 also resulted in SOBSI's own abrupt, violent elimination from the labor scene, along with the sixty-two unions affiliated with it. The establishment of the New Order also saw a further consolidation of state power. This process

had in fact begun in the late 1950s with the military's appropriation of state administrative functions in response to regional rebellions. It was through this medium of state power that Indonesia's domestic bourgeoisie eventually crystallized during the more rapid development of industrial capitalism under Suharto (see Robison 1986).

Elite-initiated maneuvers later culminated in the fusion of the remaining labor organizations into a new, state-sanctioned federation in 1973. This was the FBSI (Federasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia), later to be known as the SPSI (Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia) and then the FSPSI. With the establishment of the FBSI, links between the labor movement and political parties were formally severed. This tack was part and parcel of the New Order's strategy of control and demobilization of society-based groups in the name of providing political stability for economic development.

Labor was then directed to confine itself to the strictly "social and economic" realm and reject its political past. The notion of Pancasila Industrial Relations (Hubungan Industrial Pancasila; HIP) was presented as in opposition to foreign-derived notions of conflict between workers and employers.[18] Workers, capital, and the state were seen as components of one big family, with the latter playing the role of benevolent and wise father. Consequently, even the exercise of the legally recognized right to strike became stigmatized as "un-Pancasila" and "un-Indonesian," providing an ideological basis for the suppression of worker militancy.

## Class, Industrialization, and Social Change

A prominent feature of official New Order political discourse, then, has been a denial of the existence of classes or of class conflict. Their existence went against the very core of official New Order political thinking, which was premised on a holistic, organicist view of the relationship between state and society. Accordingly, the word *buruh* ("laborer"), highly charged because of its use by militant unions in the independence struggle, was intentionally displaced with the more neutral term, *pekerja*. Similarly, the FBSI became the SPSI in 1985, with *buruh* being substituted by *pekerja* in the process. Similarly, an alternative word to denote "labor" or "worker" became *karyawan* (roughly, "functionary"). The term was coined by the military-created SOKSI as part of its ideological war with SOBSI and the PKI in the early 1960s. *Karyawan*, however, stripped the worker or *buruh* of any situational or relational context. Suharto-assistant Moertopo was to proclaim in 1971 that, in Indonesia, "only one class will remain, that of the *karyawan*" (Capizzi 1974, 42).

Given this ideological predisposition, if civil unrest in Suharto's New Order showed a social-economic or class dimension, it was often officially explained by recourse to ethnic or religious references. For example, labor riots in Medan in 1994 involving twenty thousand factory workers and resulting in the death of a local Chinese businessman were officially portrayed as the product of tensions between indigenous Indonesians (*pribumi)* and ethnic Chinese, rather than an explosive dispute between workers and employers (Heryanto 1994, 30). While anti-Chinese sentiment was undoubtedly a factor in the event, the dissociation of racial and ethnic issues from those pertaining to socio-economic inequalities was striking.

The denial of classes should not be read as stemming from an inherently cultural aversion to the idea of class conflict. Instead, it is more indicative of the agenda of a state whose officials had developed a vested interest in an economic development process intertwined with the emergence of a domestic bourgeoisie "incubated" by state policies in industry and finance. Politico-bureaucratic and business alliances became fused in a capitalist oligarchy that succeeded in appropriating state power for itself (Robison and Hadiz, forthcoming). The oligarchy was insulated from significant working class pressure by the political exclusion of labor through corporatist and repressive modes of control.

The denial of the existence of classes in Indonesia is ironically reproduced in many academic interpretations of labor's lack of overt militancy, a lack often blamed on the salience of religious influences. Writing about female factory workers in Tangerang in the early 1980s, for example, Mather (1983) cited Islamic-derived patriarchal values as a key variable in her explanation of the absence of labor militancy. Since industrialization in Tangerang had at that time been sufficiently limited so that the local population was adequate to meet factor demand for low-wage labor, Mather suggested that patriarchal forms of domination in the family were reproduced, or at least reinforced, in the factory. The putative low status of women in Islam was, to Mather, the source of these values. In this view, female factory workers moved simply and uncritically from one milieu of subordination to another, first in the family and then in the factory, where male authority figures supervised their work (Mather 1983, 157).

Some of the material conditions for the development of the class awareness Mather saw as lacking had been growing, albeit at a slow pace, as industrialization proceeded under Suharto's New Order. The structural transformation of Indonesia's inherited colonial economy only really took place under Suharto. At the start of the New Order in the mid-1960s, manufacturing accounted for a mere 8 percent of Indonesia's gross

domestic product (Hill 1994, 57). By 1995, it comprised 24 percent, with agriculture's contribution declining steeply (World Bank 1996, 139). At the same time, manufacturing sector workers came to comprise 12.6 percent of the total Indonesian workforce before the 1997 economic crisis (World Bank 1997, 153), compared to 6.5 percent in 1971. The switch to export-led industrialization and labor-intensive manufacturing in the mid-1980s was central to this development.

During the same years, much of the industrial working class came to work and live in new, densely populated urban centers in and around the Jakarta-Bogor-Tangerang-Bekasi[19] area in west Java and the Surabaya-Malang-Mojokerto-Gresik area in east Java. Similar smaller centers in north Sumatra and south Sulawesi were also growing. In these localities, a sense of working class identity and solidarity, however ambiguous, was encouraged by the experience of everyday life in a sprawling, tough, urban, and industrial milieu that included vast new urban slums. New communities developed a culture of sharing such items as communal wells, food, and soap, as well as information and gossip.

Such a milieu facilitated the initial attempts, sometimes involving NGO activists, to revive labor organizing under these difficult circumstances. These efforts usually involved the formation of semi-formal groups, and then networks of groups, to share in discussion and reading, as well as the promotion of mutual assistance societies, cooperatives, singing and theater troupes, and prayer meetings. From such networks, talk of strike action and dreams of future trade unions were frequently forged.

In this regard, the community has been an important site in the development of this class awareness, however ambiguous, as well as workers' organizations (Munck 1988, 100). Community-centered efforts to organize were no doubt encouraged because of the stringent restrictions on organizing in the factory. The result was a dramatic rise in strike action in the 1990s in spite of the continuing existence of a repressive system of labor control. There were 350 strikes in 1996 compared to 19 in 1989 according to conservative government statistics.

This is not to suggest, however, that ties between today's urban workers and their home villages have been totally severed; they definitely have not. What we see in Indonesia is essentially a first-generation industrial working class with close family and other ties to the countryside. The degree to which rural Indonesia, and Java in particular, manages to act as a place of effective refuge when struggles are lost in the city is an important factor influencing the strength of perceptions of individual workers about the permanence of their urban situation.[20] A test has been offered by the 1997–2000 economic crisis. Mass retrenchments have forced many

workers to return to their places of origin, although it is unclear how many have managed to stay for extended periods.

Nevertheless, there have always been strong clues about the salience of ties outside the urban, industrial milieu. An example is the long-established tradition of return of workers to their places of origin undertaken during the annual *Idul Fitri* celebrations at the end of the Muslim fasting month. This travel is physically taxing, because of the sheer numbers of human beings participating and the limitations of public transport. Many members of the middle class, even in Indonesia's most cosmopolitan city, Jakarta, display this same affinity for their place of origin and make the same annual trip during *Idul Fitri*. Ethnic and religious ties no doubt also inform the perceptions and worldviews of stockbrokers, insurance salesmen, bank clerks, accountants, and corrupt petty bureaucrats. But few analysts would argue that these people do not simultaneously display middle-class identities and aspirations.

So all the above should not lead to the conclusion that religious, ethnic, or regional identities are necessarily supplanted by the slow development of class awareness in the industrialization process. In fact, these can exist side by side, interacting and sometimes overlapping. As Brown observed, Marx's view of class as a communal group with a common, homogeneous culture may accord with the structure of nineteenth-century European society, but it does not apply to most postcolonial ones. There has been an increasing recognition that "class consciousness may assume diverse forms depending upon the kind of situational options and cultural values available to individuals in their everyday life" (Brown 1994, 212).

The latter view accords well with E. P. Thompson's observation long ago that class "happens" when common experiences, whether inherited or shared, are articulated as an identity of interests among some, as opposed to the interests of others. In urban Indonesia, placing young literate workers in a bleak industrial milieu within a bus ride of the glaring affluence of the few no doubt contributes to a growing sense of "us" and "them." However, this kind of consciousness is always "handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value systems, ideas and institutional forms." To Thompson (1968, 9) "consciousness of class arises in the same way in different times and places, but never in just the same way."

"Proletarian identity" in "pure" form, in any case, has always been an historical rarity, even in the context of the development of metropolitan capitalism. Michael Mann, who assessed variations in working class movements in Europe during the twentieth century, argues that "proletarian imagery had to compete in workers' consciousness with many other images," including the "multiple undercutting images of everyday life,

derived from gender, age, family responsibilities, religion, region, and so on." According to Mann, "Social actors rarely have a unitary sense of self or society" (Mann 1995, 19).

Still, the dominant tendency among scholars of labor in post-colonial or late industrializing societies is to treat ethnic or religious identity as a bothersome residue of the past. Some have argued, for example, that worker consciousness can be "affected" by ethnic identity, but that this is compatible with trade unionism, although not with revolutionary consciousness (see Munck 1988, 94–95). This is perhaps a too simplistic view and confuses the development of working class identity with Leninist notions of the rise of a revolutionary vanguard.

In spite of the frequent identification of Islamic-derived patriarchal values as a prohibiting factor for working class organization,[21] then, the argument could be made that religious belief can simultaneously contribute to the emergence of labor solidarity. In Indonesia, this is so partly because the religious belief of the majority of factory workers is different from those of foreign or Indonesian Chinese supervisors and employers. Employers in Indonesia have been known to complain about the time that is lost as workers demand the right to observe the Muslim requirement of daily prayers at set times, two (out of five) of which would take place during regular work hours. It is conceivable that some workers who have made this demand have not done so exclusively for reasons of piety, but as a small gesture of resistance to the grinding routine of factory work. It is also significant that one demand that workers present during strike action is for the provision of adequate places of worship in the factory compound, again indicating religion's role in cementing working class solidarity.

That religion should take up such a role, however, is not at all historically unique. It has been noted, for example, how Methodism and radicalism in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century England may have been closely intertwined (Munck 1988, 102; see also Thompson 1968). A link between Islam and labor solidarity has also been made in contemporary Nigeria (Munck 1988, 102). In light of these and other examples, we would be mistaken to view religious allegiances as inherently conservative or progressive. These solidarities are capable of carrying contradictory aspirations and functions. In Europe in the early twentieth century, for example, conservative religious-based movements that targeted the working class helped to stem the rising socialist tide (Mann 1995, 27–34).

In the Indonesian case, Islam has to an extent helped to cement working class solidarity, but has also been used, for example, to discourage organizing activities by young women, on the grounds meetings take place

during evenings and in cramped proximity to male counterparts (Hadiz 1997, 122–123). Deterring young women from organizing is potentially important given their strong representation in the light-manufacturing workforces where much recent labor organizing has been centered. Moreover, as discussed below, Islamic symbolism blended with populist jargon has more recently been used to mobilize lower-class constituencies for elite political intrigues.

## Reformasi and New Organizing Vehicles

The fledgling labor movement in Indonesia has yet to organize itself as a coherent force. There remains nothing like a national center capable of negotiating on behalf of workers; none of the major political parties have organic links to the labor movement either. The former "official" center, the FSPSI, unraveled almost as soon as Suharto fell, with breakaway industrial unions and former officials forming their own union organizations, most notably the SPSI-Reformasi. In any case, the FSPSI never enjoyed much domestic or international legitimacy, as its role in the New Order depended heavily on state power.

In direct contrast to official policy during the Suharto era, then, by late 1998 there were already about a dozen new union organizations registered at the Department of Manpower. The Habibie government's attempt to establish reformist credentials in the labor area involved the loosening of regulations regarding the establishment of unions, the ratification of ILO Convention No. 87 on the freedom of association, as well as the elimination of draconian manpower legislation passed by parliament in 1997. To further placate workers, the government also readopted the policy of annually increasing the minimum wage. Among the newly registered unions was the SBSI (Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia), led by the lawyer Muchtar Pakpahan. During Suharto's rule, this union had long been denied official recognition and was the target of frequent state repression.[22]

Developments like these encouraged others who hoped to establish new union organizations. Some of the new associations did not bother to register with the Department of Manpower, perhaps in a show of contempt for the Habibie government's reformist claims. The economic context, however, is less than hospitable to these new organizing endeavors. Indonesia's economic crisis resulted in negative 14 percent economic growth in 1998 (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 4, 1999, 44), and the resulting unemployment did little to help the bargaining position of worker-activists.[23]

Among the more prominent of the new labor groups in the greater Jakarta–west Java area are KABI (Kesatuan Aksi Buruh Indonesia), KOBAR (Komite Buruh untuk Aksi Reformasi), and JEBAK (Jaringan Buruh Antar Kota). Perbupas, a union of workers in the shoe industry in the Jabotabek area, has also been formed, with close links to the labor NGO, SISBIKUM.

KABI, based in Jabotabek, was particularly active in representing workers during the latter stages of the parliament house "takeover" in May and has subsequently established the Serikat Buruh Jabotabek (SBJ).[24] JEBAK, although strongest in the industrial areas surrounding Bandung, has also developed a following in greater Jakarta as well as several other regions. KOBAR, like KABI, is particularly active in greater Jakarta, but also has bases of support in other regions. It also maintains links with PRD activists[25] and with groups of radical students, particularly at the University of Indonesia. In May 1999, it established the Indonesian National Front for Labor Struggles (FNPBI).[26] In addition, an ad hoc supra-grouping of Jabotabek labor groups, ASBI, has been involved in concerted actions, though there is as yet little evidence of unity among them. Similar networks reportedly exist in East Java and south Sulawesi. In Surabaya, a labor union, the Serikat Buruh Reformasi, has been formed although its base is confined to about twenty factories in industrial areas surrounding the city.[27]

Significantly, none of the above mentioned organizations have direct links with state or opposition political elites. Furthermore, it is possible that many unofficially recognized unions will increasingly take a local or regional format, given the difficulty of establishing national unions and the growing importance of local-level struggles because of the decline of central state authority.

Also among the new labor organizations are the PPMI (Persaudaraan Pekerja Muslim Indonesia) and new SARBUMUSI, a revival of the old NU-based trade union federation of the 1960s. Of these two, the PPMI is of more immediate importance due to its connections with sections of the state elite through ICMI, the Association of Muslim Intellectuals created by Suharto and Habibie. Although the SARBUMUSI entertains the idea of reestablishing its old namesake's base among cigarette, food, and plantation workers,[28] it does not appear to have the full support of the NU leadership. Its establishment must be seen as distinct from other elite strategies to organize labor.

The PPMI, by contrast, was established by political activists associated with ICMI in March 1998, although its existence was only announced the following May (*Kompas*, May 13, 1998) just before the fall of Suharto. It is possible to read the PPMI's establishment as an attempt to develop populist credentials for the formerly Habibie-led organization as well as to

direct labor to more moderate or controllable forms of struggle. It is also possible, however, to interpret it as an initiative to develop a vehicle through which the mass mobilization of sections of the urban poor could be undertaken in anticipation of prolonged power struggles after Suharto.[29]

## Labor and Elite Strategies

An ICMI activist and veteran *demonstran* who freely admits to having no experience in the labor movement, Eggy Sudjana emerged as chairman of the PPMI;[30] its secretary general is A. Deni Daruri, a financial consultant with a similar lack of experience. Sudjana, like other ICMI-associated activists, has been critical of the role of opposition groups, including students, who rejected the legitimacy of the Habibie government. For Sudjana, the Habibie government was bringing democratization and human and labor rights to Indonesia, and thus workers should lend it their support. Indeed, Habibie's ascendance to the presidency in May 1998 was greeted with enthusiasm among conservative Muslim groups courted by Suharto during his last decade in power.

Not surprisingly, Pakpahan's SBSI, which openly questioned the legitimacy of the Habibie government, became a target of PPMI criticism. The PPMI portrayed the SBSI as "radical and receiving much support from the international community." It also saw the SBSI as unacceptable to Indonesian workers because of its leaders' putative "phobia of Islam" and "anti-Islamic" attitudes. This was a veiled reference to the fact that Pakpahan is a Christian who made controversial statements about the possible role of ICMI in the May 1998 riots instrumental to Suharto's downfall.[31] In the same vein, the PPMI described the SBSI as an extension of the Church (PPMI 1998, 32) and a vehicle for Christian proselytizing. Objections to the SBSI were presented, then, on nationalist and religious grounds.

The PPMI's accommodating position vis-à-vis the Habibie government was consistent with its industrial relations philosophy. Sudjana argued vehemently against notions of struggle that he said frequently guide labor movements. He characterized these ideas as relics from the past, belonging "to the time of Karl Marx."[32] Reflecting the orthodoxy of Suharto's New Order on the question of class, Daruri notes that *pekerja* was chosen by the PPMI for its name rather than *buruh* because the latter term suggests class struggle.[33] Ironically, the replacement of *buruh* by *pekerja* in New Order-speak was earlier initiated by Admiral Sudomo, the former security chief and minister of manpower (1983–1988) who was

widely reviled by Muslim political activists, before he made a widely publicized conversion from Christianity to Islam in 1998.

None of this means, however, that the PPMI was averse to taking an adversarial role toward selected employers. According to Daruri, the PPMI was ready to mobilize its supporters through demonstrations if it lost a case in the labor courts system—something that could only mean that "justice had not been served."[34] It was because of this willingness to launch mass actions—including an attack on the house of a major Chinese banker and *konglomerat*—that the PPMI acquired special significance in the context of elite-initiated mass mobilizations of sections of the poor in the post-Suharto period. The most prominent early example of this tactic was the deployment of the so-called Pam Swakarsa, a civilian militia recruited from the ranks of the Jakartan poor and unemployed, against pro-democracy students protesting against the Habibie government and the MPR special session in November 1998. According to Sudjana, the PPMI is a pressure group for workers, which means that it will use mass action when necessary (*Republika,* May 12, 1998). In his words, "Advocacy on the Streets" is equivalent to the "Practice of *Jihad*" (religiously sanctioned struggle) (Sudjana 1998, 117).

Claiming, rather fantastically, a membership of six hundred thousand, the PPMI attempted in the months following Suharto's fall to establish a base among a wide range of workers, including those in manufacturing and transport. It did so by, among other things, distributing leaflets in mosques located in working class areas.[35] It also developed a small white-collar membership, which reportedly comprised the dues-paying section of the organization.[36] In addition, the PPMI tried to cultivate support among sections of the growing urban *lumpenproletariat* and the informal sector.[37]

Significantly, during this period the PPMI was most likely to mobilize unemployed and underemployed youth, not workers, for demonstrations, including those pertaining to white-collar worker grievances. This raised suspicions among detractors of the PPMI that it was an elite-initiated vehicle of political mobilization and thuggery. In a case during which the employees of liquidated private banks undertook protest action, critics of the PPMI claimed that Sudjana received money both from striking workers and from the lawyer representing the liquidated banks. Sudjana denied the charge. His detractors also suggested that the PPMI hired demonstrators for its protest actions to augment it own small numbers (*Xpos,* March 25–31, 1999).

However real or imagined the PPMI's significance, it is notable that its activists were not involved in the initial revival of working class activism in

the early 1990s. The PPMI remains a fledgling organization. In light of the relative absence of religiously oriented organizations before 1998, the organizations and networks rooted in this earlier phase of labor activism have been the ones targeted by PPMI. Most of these organizations pinned their hopes on substantive political reform to provide greater room for effective independent organizing. They were hardly inclined to look favorably on the Habibie government that succeeded Suharto. In contrast, the PPMI had close ties to the forces that attempted to defend the Habibie presidency, ultimately unsuccessfully, including Adi Sasono, ICMI secretary-general and Habibie cabinet member. From the PPMI's viewpoint, however, "most labor NGOs frequently politicize labor issues for certain political interests" (PPMI 1998, ii).

Not having such inclinations himself, Sudjana was reportedly on the Council of People's Authority (Dewan Daulat Rakyat) established by Sasono in 1998 to support his "people's economy" program and political positioning in anticipation of the June 1999 parliamentary elections.[38] Other instruments Sasono established included a party, the Partai Daulat Rakyat—which, in the end, did very poorly in these elections—and a mass organization, the Persatuan Daulat Rakyat. He also formed the Badan Daulat Rakyat, an association allegedly composed of martial arts fighters from the Jabotabek area (SiaR News Service, April 5, 1999), and clearly intended to serve as a civilian militia or paramilitary. Most of the leading political parties had formed their own paramilitary groups in the lead-up to the October 1999 People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) session (*Gatra,* August 21, 1999) that ultimately saw Habibie's political demise.

The involvement of the PPMI in the failed attempts of the old regime elite to protect the Habibie presidency was carried out quite openly. Notwithstanding his advocacy of "street jihad," in late 1998 Sudjana organized twenty thousand people in Jakarta to protest against student-led street demonstrations urging the MPR to ditch Habibie and the status quo. Indeed, Sudjana acted as leader and spokesman for an ad hoc Forum Ummat Islam Bersama (FUIB), consisting of numerous groups, including ultraconservative Muslim groups like KISDI (*Republika,* October 6), which embraced Muslim activists formerly allied to General Prabowo Subianto, the ambitious Suharto son-in-law forced into retirement after Suharto's fall.[39] Prior to the MPR session, and consistent with the story told by Hermawan Sulistyo in the next essay, KISDI had responded to anti-military demonstrations by one of the more militant anti-Habibie student groupings, the Forum Kota, by branding them "cowardly heathens."[40]

## Mirroring the Past or Reflecting the Future?

We should not conclude from these events that we are witnessing in the post-Suharto period a replication of the 1950s cleavage between class-based and Muslim labor organizations. The great majority of organizations that the PPMI claims are "politicizing" labor refrain from using class terminology, with the notable exception of the PRD-linked PPBI.[41] This is not surprising. Many labor-based NGO activists have imbibed aspects of the New Order's ideological denial of class,[42] while simultaneously espousing the values of the liberal and social democratic opposition to Suharto. This legacy can be seen in activists' preference for social-democratic models of trade unionism and their insistence on separating social and economic labor struggles from radical political ones (see Hadiz 1997). It is significant that the political socialization of some of these NGO activists took place via formal or informal links to the pre–New Order foes of the Communist Party.[43]

It remains to be seen whether organizations like the PPMI will stand the test of time and political struggle. What we may yet see, however, are growing tensions between those who link labor struggles to a wider social democratic or radical project, and those who wish to use labor struggles to help New Order elites reposition themselves in the new political environment. The latter format would likely involve selective mass mobilizations by rival elites using nationalist and populist rhetoric as well as money and thuggery.

So far, there is also little evidence of a return to the labor pattern of the 1950s with its close links between individual labor organizations and political parties. The establishment of new labor organizing vehicles after Suharto's fall occurred concurrently with the establishment of new parties,[44] many with religio-political identities. However, as yet few links have been established between these parties and the labor movement, although some like the PAN (National Mandate Party, led by the Muhammadiyah leader, Amien Rais) have established labor sections. The lack of linkage could simply reflect, of course, the political parties' newness and their inability as yet to develop effective electoral strategies.

This much said, my conversations with workers and labor activists in May and June 1998 (immediately after Suharto's fall) suggested that they were not enthusiastic about the newly established parties, even labor ones. Little appears to have changed since that time. During a rare public meeting with representatives of political parties in Ujungpandang, workers voiced the opinion that none of the new parties appear genuinely

pro-worker (*Kompas,* March 22, 1999). Not surprisingly, the four parties that came out with labor identities failed terribly in the June 1999 elections. None, including Muchtar Pakpahan's National Labor Party, managed to win even a single seat in parliament.

Workers remained a floating mass in these elections, then, although many joined with the urban poor to support the PDI-P, led by the nationalist politician, Megawati Sukarnoputri. In one respect, however, the PDI-P differed very little from other parties. As noted by the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (1999, 16), the party showed little interest in meeting with workers or labor activists during the 1999 campaign.

Might the PDI-P be yet transformed into a labor party and offer workers some measure of political inclusion? In spite of its popularity among workers, this seems unlikely. The party is dominated by political entrepreneurs whose careers were made through shady backroom deals among elites during the Suharto era. Disgruntled refugees from Golkar and retired military officers now supplement older party members.[45] Moreover, the party is a proponent of an organic-statism akin to that espoused by Golkar during Moertopo's heyday. Such organic-statism envisions a natural unity between the rulers and ruled, and resolves conflict between groups by creating a state ostensibly above particular interests. During Suharto's rule, organicist thinking clearly played a part in legitimizing the interests of a ruling capitalist oligarchy (Robison and Hadiz, forthcoming).

That the PDI-P leadership includes a sprinkling of liberal reformers, professionals, and academics initially gave the party reformist credentials. But these liberals are out of place in a sea of statist-nationalists, much as Suharto's old economic technocrats were outnumbered in Golkar.[46] The party's market-oriented liberals are also unlikely to favor an agenda that strengthens organized labor. It is telling in this regard that there are no labor representatives in the party leadership, in spite of the PDI-P's popularity among workers.

For the near future, then, no major party seems likely to provide an avenue for the political inclusion of labor. Some of the old political elite appear eager to utilize the banner of working class struggles for their purposes. The PPMI in particular seems intent on mobilizing lower-class support for groups like the Bulan Bintang, a conservative modernist Muslim party, or the ICMI faction of Golkar. Sudjana is a functionary of the Bulan Bintang, and served as head of its section charged with "election-winning actions" (*Kompas*, February 11, 1999). Other members of the Bulan Bintang include Ahmad Sumargono, chairman of the hard-line KISDI, and Fadli Zon, a close ally of Prabowo Subianto.

The election of the NU leader, Abdurrahman Wahid, to the presidency in October 1999, and Megawati Sukarnoputri to the vice presidency, seemed to hasten the unraveling of the New Order's institutional framework. But events since then, including an unprecedented increase in putatively "religious" violence in Maluku, shows that the struggle to constitute a new political format is far from finished. The labor movement will be affected by the outcomes of these struggles, although it remains ill placed to influence them decisively. All this may strengthen a conservative populism that is ardently anti-communist as well as nationalistic, and includes a large dose of Islamic symbolism. Such an ideological constellation could become the armory for coalitions intent on maintaining labor's political exclusion even while making populist appeals for a redistribution of national wealth along ethnic or religious lines. This populism recalls that of the indigenous petty bourgeoisie of the 1950s, which was also threatened by the emergence of radical tendencies among the working class.

Of course, the mobilization of the working class for petty propertied classes or politically conservative interests is not historically unprecedented. Similar support was provided by sections of the European working classes in the early twentieth century to populist and fascist regimes. Their para-militaries, goons, and thugs were largely recruited from the working class (Mann 1995, 39–40).[47] Organized labor also helped to prop up the regimes of Vargas and Peron in Latin America.[48] Sections of the working class movement in Indonesia too may yet be drawn further into the strategies of conservative power coalitions intent on retaining power and influence.

## Notes

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1. The analysis that follows relies on research undertaken for my *Workers and the State in New Order Indonesia* (Hadiz 1997). However, it has been supplemented by research undertaken in 1998–1999 following the fall of Suharto.

2. As argued, for example, by Budiman 1998.

3. This in part has to do with the long tradition of Christian social work in Indonesia, which has included activities with the urban poor and, more recently, industrial labor.

4. Interview with Sister Vincentia, Catholic nun and labor activist, October 16, 1998.

5. Federasi Serikat Pekerja Seluruh Indonesia; "All Indonesia Workers Federation." Contending factions within the union have effectively nullified its role. The most prominent is the FPSI-Reformasi.

6. Loren Ryter is writing a potentially groundbreaking Ph.D. thesis on political gangsters in the New Order. See Ryter 1998.

7. SOBSI was the Sentral Organisasi Buruh Seluruh Indonesia.

8. Serikat Buruh Islam Indonesia/Gabungan Serikat Buruh Islam Indonesia; Indonesian Islamic Trade Union/Amalgamated Islamic Trade Unions of Indonesia.

9. Serikat Buruh Muslimin Indonesia; Indonesian Muslim Trade Union.

10. Kesatuan Buruh Kerakyatan Indonesia; Populist Workers Union of Indonesia.

11. Kongres Buruh Seluruh Indonesia; All Indonesia Workers Congress.

12. The SBII/GASBIINDO was linked to the urban petty bourgeois MASYUMI (Majelis Syuro Muslimin Indonesia). Masyumi was the party of the "modernist" wing of the Muslim community. The SARBUMUSI was linked to the rural-based NU (Nahdlatul Ulama), which represented the "traditionalist" wing of the Islamic movement. The KBKI was rooted in the PNI (Indonesian National Party), the party of the Javanese *priyayi* and the state bureaucracy. The KBSI was associated with the small urban intelligentsia-based PSI (Partai Sosialis Indonesia; Indonesian Socialist Party).

13. In 1953 only 575 out of the registered 25,000 firms had more than 500 employees. While more than one-third of the plantation establishments had more than 500 employees, most industrial firms had less than 20 and were family-oriented. The great majority of industrial workers were involved in handicraft rather than industrial production during the early independence period (Hawkins 1963a, 85–86).

14. All of the above points were confirmed in interviews with former officials of the SBPP and SBKA, pro-SOBSI unions; respectively May 21, 1994 and July 13, 1994.

15. This point was confirmed by Agus Sudono, formerly of the GASBIINDO; interview, January 18, 1994.

16. Military-Labor Co-operation Body.

17. Sentral Organisasi Karyawan Sosialis Indonesia. Later in the New Order, "Sosialis" was changed to "Swadaya" or self-reliant.

18. See the ideas outlined in Moertopo 1975.

19. Known collectively as "Jabotabek," or, roughly, the greater Jakarta area.

20. Hanagan (1986) discusses the importance of the permanence of urban residence and work to the early development of working class protest.

21. Even if Mather's analysis is accepted for the time and place of her fieldwork, there is good reason to question its relevance today. One of the notable features of contemporary labor unrest is the militancy and leadership of female workers.

22. Pakpahan himself was released from jail within days of Suharto's resignation along with several other political prisoners.

23. By early 1999, the government estimated that nearly 17 million out of a workforce of approximately 90 million would be jobless (*Kompas,* February 19, 1999). The limited economic recovery since that time has not yet greatly diminished this unemployment.

24. Interview with Sister Vincentia, October 16, 1998.

25. The People's Democratic Party was scapegoated by the Suharto government for rioting in Jakarta on July 27, 1996, after the storming of the Indonesian Democratic Party's headquarters by government troops and paid thugs. The PRD is comprised primarily of radical student activists.

26. It involves labor organizations in eight cities in Sumatra, Java, and Sulawesi. Personal communication, FNPBI, activist, July 22, 1999.

27. Discussion in Jakarta with Surabaya factory worker and SBR member, July 2, 1998.

28. Interview with Sutanto Martoprasono, SARBUMUSI chairman, November 3, 1998.

29. The formation of the PPMI seemed at first hardly to enjoy a consensus among the established political elite. A minister of manpower decision forbade the establishment of unions on the basis of "primordial" allegiances such as religion. In late 1998, the PPMI's attempt to register at the Department of Manpower was rebuffed, probably because its stated basis on Islam contradicted Minister of Manpower Fahmi Idris's regulation. Displaying the ambivalence of state policy in this period of political reconstitution, the PPMI was nevertheless invited to meetings at the Department of Manpower, which involve unions already registered. It was finally registered sometime in 1999.

30. Interview, November 20, 1998. Sudjana has been characterized in the press as a *raja demo,* or "king of demonstrators."

31. Responding to accusations Pakpahan allegedly made in the Muslim publication *Ummat* that the violence of May 1998 was indirectly the result of an ICMI presence, Sudjana claimed that Pakpahan was trespassing into politics. He also accused Pakpahan of exploiting labor for his personal political ambitions (*Republika,* June 25, 1998). State officials routinely accused Pakpahan of being the son of a communist activist.

32. Interview, November 20, 1998.

33. Interview with A. Deni Daruri, November 20, 1998. The PPMI's own publication notes "the PPMI does not recognize the term *buruh.* A more neutral word used that has a wider dimension is *pekerja"* (PPMI 1998, ii). The aversion to class is reminiscent of the Muslim unions of the 1950s and 1960s. Former members of these unions, including GASBIINDO and the GOBSII, were reportedly consulted in the establishment of the PPMI.

34. Interview, November 20, 1998.

35. This must be taken with a grain of salt given the often-exaggerated claims made by other organizations, including the SBSI.

36. Interview with A. Deni Daruri, November 20, 1998.

37. Interviews with Eggi Sudjana and A. Deni Daruri, November 20, 1998.

38. A former NGO activist and proponent of Marxist-inspired dependency theory (Arief and Sasono 1981), Sasono advocated state tariffs and subsidies to strengthen the indigenous and Islamic capitalist and middle classes, in opposition to the IMF. Not surprisingly, the PPMI has echoed Sasono's populist appeals by decrying the global capitalist system, which is "imposed on Islamic states by Western capitalist countries" (PPMI 1998, 131).

39. KISDI, the Indonesian Committee for Global Islamic Solidarity, was initially formed as a support group for the plight of Palestinian and, later, Muslim Bosnians.

40. See "Ternyata Forkot Takut Lasykar Pembela Islam," in *KISDI Interaktif*. The site contains strikingly strong and derisive language against students and the PDI-P.

41. The Center for Working Class Struggle, the labor arm of the PRD.

42. SBSI activists have also been reluctant to speak in class terms. This was apparent in comments made by SBSI members at a seminar held at Yayasan SPES on July 15, 1994.

43. The Yayasan Buruh Membangun, for example, has ties to the old SOB Pantjasila as well as to individuals associated with the old Indonesian Socialist Party (see Hadiz 1997, 143).

44. From the fall of Suharto until March 1999, almost 150 new parties had been formed, although only 48 eventually fulfilled the criteria to contest the June 1999 elections.

45. The PDI-P is the larger faction of the old PDI which recognizes Megawati's leadership.

46. On these economic technocrats and their ideas, see Chalmers and Hadiz 1997.

47. Although Mann suggests that industrial workers tended to support their left-wing foes.

48. The rise of political gangsterism, civilian militias, and private armies as elements in elite strategies to mobilize lower-class support may be indicative of such a trend in Indonesia. In early 1999 the armed forces supported the establishment of a civilian militia to succeed the notorious Pam Swakarsa of November 1998. Not surprisingly, the new organization's membership was also largely drawn from the urban and rural poor and unemployed.

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# 12

# Greens in the Rainbow

## Ethnoreligious Issues and the Indonesian Armed Forces

*Hermawan Sulistiyo*

### Historical fallacies Concerning the TNI's Origins

The Indonesian Armed Forces, or TNI,[1] was and still is a significant player on the Indonesian social and political scene. The TNI's role in political life reaches back to the first formative years of the republic, when the struggle for independence from the Dutch was not limited to diplomatic efforts but also involved armed struggle. The new republic was proclaimed on August 17, 1945. Five days later, on August 22, the newborn government established its first armed forces, named the Body for the People's Security (Badan Keamanan Rakyat, or BKR). At the national level the BKR was placed under the Central Indonesian National Committee (Komite Nasional Indonesia Pusat, or KNIP). At the provincial level, the BKR was placed under regional committees (Komite Nasional Daerah, or KND). Then, on October 5, 1945, the government renamed its armed forces the Army of People's Security, or Tentara Keamanan Rakyat (TKR). This first use of the term *tentara*, meaning military or army, is today seen as the first official designation of the armed forces as a national military institution. Hence, October 5, 1945, is regarded as the official birthday of the armed forces.

The two terms—*tentara* (army, military) and *rakyat* (people)—convey an irony in the historiography of modern Indonesia. First, despite the reference to the "people," the fact is that the military was never placed under formal civilian control, since the armed forces was born on October 5,

1945, a time when there was as yet no civilian supremacy. In subsequent years, the military cited this historical "fact" to assert its "historical right" not to be under civilian control and, conversely, to assume a role in non-military affairs.

In fact, a closer look into the BKR provides an alternative insight into military historiography. When the BKR was formed, there were about 150,000 personnel that had previously received military training or had served in the Dutch colonial army (known by its acronym, the KNIL) and Japanese occupation army. The latter was made up of two primary bodies, the Defenders of the Fatherland (Tentara Pembela Tanah Air, or PETA) and the Japanese auxiliary force, or Heiho. Both groups were heavily armed with weapons seized from Japan's occupation army during the vacuum of power following the Japanese surrender to the Allies on August 15, 1945. The BKR was a large and well-equipped military force, then, compared to those of other Asian countries at the time.

The second irony is that the phrase *tentara rakyat,* or "people's army," suggests the military is an inseparable entity from the people. This perception strengthened the first fallacy, that the Indonesian military could and must play a role in non-military affairs. Official historiography has always argued that Indonesia achieved its freedom more by armed struggle than diplomatic efforts. This reinforces a historical myth identifying the military as a founding institution of the republic.

Animated by assumptions like these, the military over time moved deeper and deeper into non-military affairs and came to dominate the political arena. These fallacies culminated in the doctrine known as *dwifungsi*, or "dual functions." The doctrine taught that the TNI, as a "professional military," had to be active in socio-political affairs as well as the defense realm. Soldiers had to be good in politics and social life as well as on the battlefield. One aspect of the dual function role that later became controversial was the assignment of serving and retired officers to posts in the civilian bureaucracy and state-owned companies. The doctrine eventually justified the armed forces' reaching beyond politics and getting involved in ethnic and religious affairs.

After its declaration of independence, Indonesia faced serious ethnic tensions, among others, in its effort at nation-building. As a far-from-realized "imagined community" (Anderson 1983), Indonesia had some 300 ethnic groups and some 450 languages and dialects. Added to its ethnic and territorial fragmentation were religious problems. As an institution filled with personnel from various ethnic and religious backgrounds, the armed forces has always been and is still affected by ethnoreligious issues.

## Ethnicity and Religion in the Formative Years

The historical struggle for Indonesian independence, known in Indonesian as the *pergerakan*, is typically viewed as having started in 1908, when a group of Javanese medical students founded an organization called Boedi Oetomo. Today, this date is officially remembered as the National Awakening Day. However, the organization's statutes actually stated that its goal was to promote Javanese culture, and, in this sense, it was not yet a fully nationalist organization. Three years later, another organization, the Muslim Trade Association (Sarekat Dagang Islam, or SDI), was established in central Java with the goal of promoting the interests of Muslim businessmen. Soon the SDI transformed itself into a political party under the name of Sarekat Islam, or SI. Internally, this religiously grounded organization bridged ethnic divisions, but externally its religious basis clearly separated it from non-Muslims. In this early period, then, these and other political organizations were still strongly influenced by traditional ethnoreligious allegiances.

Toward the end of the Dutch presence in the Netherlands Indies, in the 1930s, the colonial government started to recruit and train indigenous youth as military officers. The colonial government adopted this policy in response to new tensions in world politics. There was a growing threat of world war, and the Dutch realized they did not have sufficient numbers of soldiers to respond to a possible invasion from Japan. The recruitment of indigenous Indonesians provided an opportunity for aspirants from various ethnic backgrounds to enlist. In the Bandung Royal Dutch Military Academy (Koninklijke Militaire Academie, or KMA) at the end of the colonial period, cadets from different ethnic backgrounds began to think of themselves as members of a common community, even a single nation (see Simatupang 1996, 72–84).

In March 1942, the Japanese invaded the East Indies. They met with almost no resistance and quickly routed the Dutch. The defeat had a tremendous effect on the minds of ordinary Indonesians, shattering in one fell swoop the myth of white supremacy. The Japanese occupation that followed lasted for three and one-half years. It provided the first opportunity for large numbers of Indonesians to train themselves in modern armaments. Through these and other measures, the Japanese occupation strengthened the feeling of sameness among native members of the armed forces first developed in the late colonial period. After the proclamation of independence on August 17, 1945, Indonesia entered a long phase of armed struggle against the returning Dutch colonial power. During the independence war, the official armed forces of the republic was made up

of two different groups: those who had trained together as cadets in the Dutch colonial army, and those who had trained in military and paramilitary bodies created during the Japanese occupation. In addition to these formally trained military bodies, of course, untrained people's volunteers also became a major component in the Indonesian army. They formed units known as the *lasykar rakyat*, or people's militias.

Following the guerrilla war and diplomatic efforts from 1947 to 1949, the Dutch finally transferred sovereignty to the Republic of Indonesia in December 1949. The newborn state lacked the funds to pay its now sizable armed forces. As a result, smuggling became an important source of "supplemental" funds. In the typical pattern, officers cooperated with Chinese businessmen to smuggle commodities, opium, and other items in exchange for arms and other necessities.

Complicating these arrangements was the as-yet irregular structure of the TNI itself. Officers in many units assigned themselves their own ranks, and combat units involved in the guerrilla campaign were often entirely independent of each other. A leader of a small military unit, then, might assign himself the rank of, say, lieutenant and give his company fellows the ranks of sergeant, corporal, and private. Guerrilla units in the people's militias made the situation even more complicated, as there was no effective coordinating authority to control them. After independence then, a rationalization of TNI's organization was carried out, resulting in the decommissioning of tens of thousands of soldiers. The program caused great resentment toward the central government, especially in the ranks of the former people's militias.

From 1950 to 1957, the central government operated under a parliamentary and multiparty system which, while broadly democratic, was relatively unstable. The longest serving cabinet, that of Ali Sastroamidjojo (1955–1957), lasted less than two years. The growing centralization of state power in Jakarta caused resentment in the provinces, giving rise, ultimately, to four major insurgencies: the Revolutionary Government of the Indonesian Republic (PRRI) in Sumatra, Permesta in north Sulawesi, the Government of Islam (DI/TII) of Kahar Muzakkar in south Sulawesi, and the Government of Islam (DI/TI) of Kartosuwiryo in west Java. In their effort to gain popular support, separatist leaders in all of these movements manipulated old ethnic and religious solidarities. The PRRI, for example, relied heavily on the regional and ethnic interests of Sumatrans, while the various DI/Government of Islam movements appealed to Muslim solidarity (often mixed, however, with regional or ethnic elements).

Believing that a liberal, parliamentary system was no longer suitable for Indonesia, in July 1959, President Sukarno, with the enthusiastic sup-

port of the army leadership, announced that the state was to return to a more centralized and presidential system of government, which he referred to as Guided Democracy. The TNI during the Guided Democracy era (1959–1965) continued to try to put down regional rebellions and ethnoreligious conflicts in the provinces. Although the armed forces succeeded in suppressing most of the rebellions, the new political format in the nation's capital simultaneously created new lines of conflict between what were now the dominant vertical streams (*aliran*) on the national scene: the military, the Muslim community, the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), and President Sukarno himself. Long concerned with the dangers of ethnoreligious disintegration, Sukarno tried desperately to hold on to power by playing the PKI against Muslims and the military (especially the army).

The major political parties grew in a similar, vertical manner at this time, consistent with the ideological and organizational streams (*aliran*) that linked political elites to mass followings, often on the basis of ethnic and religious allegiances. Under this pattern, the Communist Party received the bulk of its support from the mostly secular nationalist Javanese known as *abangan*; the nationalist PNI also shared this segment of Javanese society, although its membership included a higher number of middle-class Javanese and members of the state bureaucracy. The party of traditionalist Muslims, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), received the bulk of its support from traditionalist Muslims living on the island of Java. And, finally, the party of Islamic modernists, known as Masyumi, drew most of its support from urban Muslims, the Muslim middle-class, and Muslims from the large islands outside Java. Meanwhile, the TNI, especially its army wing, put aside its members' right to vote in exchange for its broader right to be directly involved in political affairs. Despite this fact, the armed forces itself was known to be internally factionalized, with the political sympathies of many soldiers coinciding with their ethnoreligious affiliation.

One among the primary streams or pillars of power at this time, then, was the Islamic community. Although the two main Islamic political parties—the modernist Masyumi and the traditionalist NU—had finished second and third respectively in the 1955 general elections, Islamic parties did not come to play an important role in national decision making. Despite their limited influence in the capital, the Muslim parties played an extremely influential role in daily life of the people, especially in rural communities and urban neighborhoods (*kampung*). Their activities brought them in increasing conflict with the Communist Party. Tensions increased exponentially in the early 1960s, as the PKI shifted toward a stronger emphasis on class struggle through its effort to effect the implementation

of the 1960 agrarian laws. The PKI's class strategy, however, proved to be a limited success at best. The mobilization antagonized the Muslim parties, causing them to rally all the more. At the same time, racial attacks in 1963 on the Chinese minority in Sukabumi and Bandung, two big cities in west Java, provided evidence that ethnic and racial divides were still a potentially serious source of conflict.

The abortive, left-wing officers' coup of October 1, 1965 was, in one sense, the culmination of political battles between PKI and the army. However, it also represented the culmination of factional conflicts within the armed forces themselves—between left and right, and, more generally, between factions distinguished by ethnicity, religion, and ties to different political parties. The immediate aftermath of the coup was a period of unprecedented violence; some three hundred thousand to five hundred thousand people were killed in just ten months. Contrary to public perceptions and even some historiographical work on the period, the patterns of killings were not same from one area to another. In east Java, the conflicts were far more horizontal than in many other parts of the country; killings were done mostly by members of one religious-*cum*-ideological community acting against another. In Bali, there was a mixed pattern of killing, in which members of the local Hindu community coordinated their actions with military forces against the PKI (Robinson 1995). In central Java, military operations and not communal actions were responsible for most of the killings. The armed forces command still today regards the tragedy as having been simply political in nature. In actual fact, however, the conflict involved a complex mix of communal, religious, and military-structural influences.

## The Military and Ethnoreligious Divides Under Suharto

Suharto officially came to power as president in 1967 with strong support from the armed forces. He quickly initiated a major shift in national policy, away from the emphasis on nation-building seen under President Sukarno to market-oriented (but state-controlled) economic development. To carry out its development programs, the government insisted that it needed political stability.

Suharto also set about addressing the "unfinished problems" of the Sukarno era, including assigning ethnoreligious relations a new place in social life. The New Order regime, as the Suharto government was called, established the Center for Socialization and Internalization of the State Ideology Pancasila, known as the BP-7. The center was intended to social-

ize the norms and values the regime regarded as necessary to integrate the nation. The center conducted regular and massive lectures, workshops, classes, and other public programs for three decades. Security officials implemented policies of a similar nature, prohibiting any political or social activity said to be based on SARA (Suku, Agama, Ras, Antar Golongan, that is, ethnic, religious, racial, or intergroup relations). The SARA prohibition was to become one of the state's bluntest tools for controlling the divisive issue of ethnicity and religion.

At this time, phrases like the national slogan, *bhinneka tunggal ika*, or "unity in diversity," also became part of the popular political parlance. However, diversity, particularly of an ethnoreligious sort, was viewed as a decidedly negative influence on the process of nation-building. The armed forces adopted a similar attitude. In policies and actions, it sought to prevent the growth of ethnoreligious sentiments among its officers. There was a concern, for example, that a career officer who had risen to the rank of regional commander (*kodam*)—the position requires a rank of army major general—might encounter ethnoreligious conflicts in executing his duties. On the basis of concerns like these, there was an unwritten rule that an officer with a Batak ethnic background, for example, would not be assigned to serve as a regional commander of north Sumatra, the home of the Bataks. Whether there was, in fact, such an unwritten rule is, today, a matter of dispute. Whatever the official policy, however, the fact was that it was rare that a general from a particular ethnic background was assigned a post in his place of ethnic origin.

At lower levels of the military hierarchy, too, there were tour-of-duty programs that were intended to reduce the potential for ethnoreligious sentiments becoming divisive influences inside the TNI. Continuing the tradition that cadets had received during their training in the military academy, as young officers they are almost constantly moved from one post in one part of the country to another. Owing largely to the substantial expense of regularly moving large numbers of personnel, however, the lower-ranking an official the less are his chances of being moved away from his home region. Army units in south Sulawesi, for example, were comprised of more than 70 percent local recruits; some of these soldiers never traveled out of the province. Indonesia's annual military budget, one must remember, was officially only about 1.9 percent of the national budget, one of the lowest proportions among major countries in the world.

In interviews, many officers express the feeling that religious issues, rather than ethnicity, have recently played a more troubling role in the armed forces. This was especially true in the second half of the 1980s, when President Suharto started to use Islamic symbols to buttress his flagging

political support. The army itself did not escape these influences, although the peak of religious influence was not reached until General R. Hartono became army chief-of-staff in 1991. Hartono was from an army cavalry unit, although traditionally the position of army chief of staff went to an infantryman. This fact probably contributed to his sense of vulnerability in his post, and may have contributed to his decision to use Islam as a rallying cry to increase his support in the army itself.

At this time, too, political leanings began to exercise a greater influence in the determination of officer assignments. Hartono brought the army closer to Golkar, the ruling party. On one occasion, he commented that the army was a "cadre" of Golkar and that army officers should wear "yellow jackets"—yellow is the color of Golkar's jacket. Although some officers followed his "order," many insisted that the army only knew two jacket colors, dark green and camouflage.

Parallel to this growing emphasis on political leanings in the armed forces was a growing emphasis on appealing to religiously based support. This reflected broader changes at the highest levels of the Indonesian political elite. Until the first half of the 1990s, Suharto had never been seen by the Indonesians as a particularly devout Muslim; in fact, he was always seen as a nominal or secular (*abangan*) Muslim Javanese. However, in his later years, Suharto started to present himself as a devout Muslim in an effort to win support in the Islamic community (Hefner 2000; see also the introduction to this book).

General Hartono was only one of several high-ranking generals who began to appeal to religious, especially conservative Islamic, groupings. Another general doing the same thing was General Feisal Tanjung, the one-time chief of staff. Tanjung spoke openly of his support for the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia, or ICMI), a Muslim group established by Suharto to aid in the president's efforts to mobilize support among Muslims. Hartono and Tanjung are just two examples of the increasing religious factionalism that was developing in the armed forces. The religious divide in the armed forces eventually became popularly known as the "green" army versus the "red-and-white" army. Green is the color symbol for Islam; red-and-white, the colors of the Indonesian flag, is associated with the nationalist wing of the armed forces. Most of the "red-and-white" commanders are also Muslim, but they have a different view of the proper relationship between Islam and the armed forces. By the end of the Suharto era, the "green camp" had been greatly strengthened relative to the red-and-white nationalists, above all as a result of the spectacular rise of one of recent

Indonesian history's most controversial military personalities, Leuitenant General Prabowo Subianto.

Prabowo is the son of Soemitro Djojohadikusumo, a noted economist and one of the architects of the New Order. Prabowo is also the son-in-law of former president Suharto. The speed with which Prabowo's army career took off was extraordinary. At an age when he reached the rank of three-stars general, most of his generational cohort were still only lieutenant colonels. Together with General R. Hartono, Prabowo established the Center for Policy and Development Studies, or CPDS, a strategic think tank linked to the hard-line Islamic community. Several civilian academics and political activists—Dr. Amir Santoso and Dr. Din Syamsuddin, both highly controversial figures with alleged ties to the Suharto family—directed the center. But the center itself became factionalized and eventually broke apart, largely as a result of tensions between its military sponsors. General Hartono moved out and took the name CPDS with him; Prabowo left to establish the Institute of Policy Studies, or IPS. Both institutes eventually lost much of their influence. The CPDS lost influence as a result of General Hartono's fall from power. The IPS experienced a similar trajectory after Prabowo's army special forces were alleged to have been involved in the kidnapping of students and pro-democracy activists during the final months of the Suharto regime in 1997–1998.

Added to this situation was that all chiefs-of staff and many commanders in various important positions were former Suharto adjutants; they were cynically known as "Cendana graduates." "Cendana" refers to the street in the Menteng district in Jakarta where Suharto's residence was located (Kristiadi 1999, 52). Suharto himself intervened in many military appointments and promotions, especially in the army, as part of a strategy to "franchise" his personal power. In 1996, Suharto appointed General Wiranto as chief commander of the Jakarta Regional Command (Kodam Jaya), the most strategic of the regional commands. A former close presidential adjutant, in 1997 Wiranto was promoted to commander of the Strategic Reserve Command (Kostrad). He became army chief of staff three months later, and commander of the armed forces in 1998. Although a "palace officer" (as many of his military colleagues called him) close to Suharto, Wiranto was seen as leading the "red-and-white" camp, in opposition, then, to Prabowo and the green military.

Triggered by the fatal shootings of students by army special forces at Trisakti University on May 12, 1998, Jakarta and five other Indonesian cities were shaken by massive and bloody riots on May 13–14. The riots soon took on an ugly, anti-Chinese character. Rioters attacked and looted

Chinese shops, malls, and neighborhoods. Reports indicated that, in Jakarta, gang-rapes also took place against Chinese women. Later investigations into the riots placed the blame for much of the mayhem on the armed forces. Although only in some cases is there evidence that the military actually instigated the riots, it is clear that at the very least they did not intervene to control the riots effectively. When the violence first erupted in Jakarta on May 13, 1998, the TNI's commander, General Wiranto, had taken Prabowo with him on a visit to the headquarters of the First Brigade of the Strategic Reserve Command in Malang. This fueled speculation that Wiranto may have been attempting to preempt Prabowo's involvement in the riots.

During the riots, Jakarta was in an anomic and lawless situation for about eight hours. Aside from a small number of military police, no police or army soldiers were seen on the streets during this time. It is very unlikely that the absence of TNI's presence in the time leading up to and during the riots was intentionally designed to fuel ethnoreligious tensions. But it is clear that the sudden shift in the focus of the riots—from political and economic to ethnoreligious issues (characterized by the attacks on Chinese shops and individuals)—showed once and for all that the New Order had seriously failed in its efforts to redirect racial, ethnic, and religious tensions. Resentment on the part of indigenous people toward a few wealthy Chinese linked to the military and civilian elite clearly contributed to the violence. In some places, like Jakarta and Surabaya, the Chinese were not the only targets of racial hatred; some Indians and even Arabs (in Surabaya) were also targeted. This latter fact suggests that the violence had stronger class and racial influences than it did religious, since Arabs are, like most indigenous Indonesians, Muslim. But religious influences were at least indirectly apparent in the violence. To avoid having their businesses looted or burned down, many shopowners painted their storefronts with the sign, "Milik pribumi!" ("owned by indigenous") or "Milik Muslim!" ("owned by Muslim").

## Post-Suharto Reforms

The impact of ethnoreligious factionalism within the army has left a deep mark on the post-Suharto era. In the immediate aftermath of Suharto's fall, General Wiranto moved carefully to replace or reassign generals from the "green camp." Wiranto deliberately avoided giving the appearance of taking action on religious or ideological grounds, emphasizing instead that he was acting on political and legal grounds. In removing Lieutenant

General Prabowo Subianto and Major General Sjafrie Sjamsuddin, for example, he cited concerns that they may have been negligent during the riots of May 1998, or, in Prabowo's case, involved in the kidnapping of students. Prabowo was removed to his new position as commander of the armed forces' general staff college (Sekolah Staf Komando ABRI, or Sesko ABRI) in Bandung; Sjafrie was reassigned to a non-commanding position as an "expert" to the army chief of staff.

The official announcement of Prabowo's removal explained that he needed a tour-of-duty to a position in an educational institution to "complete" his experience as high-ranking general. But he was not long in his new position. He was later brought before the Officers' Council of Ethics (Dewan Kehormatan Perwira, or DKP) over his alleged involvement in the kidnappings of students and other pro-democracy activists. Although denying direct involvement in the kidnappings, Prabowo admitted that he was responsible for any wrongdoings done by his subordinates. Prabowo was punished with what was officially an "honorable early retirement," but in fact he was forced to retire in disgrace. To save ABRI from being institutionally implicated in Prabowo's misdeeds, he was never brought before a public military tribunal. Many observers believed that he was expelled from the army, not merely because of his alleged involvement in the kidnappings, but also because of his likely involvement in the riots of May 1998.

Even these moves on Wiranto's part were not easy. Wiranto replaced Prabowo from his post as commander of Kostrad on May 24, 1998, only three days after Suharto stepped down from the presidency. In Prabowo's place, Wiranto appointed Major General Johnny Lumintang, one of the most distinguished graduates from the officers' class of 1970, a man three class years older than Lieutenant General Prabowo. However, Lumintang was able to assume his position for only seven hours; quickly handing over his position to Major General Djamari Chaniago, then regional commander of West Java Command. Unconfirmed rumors had it that acting President Habibie's camp was not happy with General Wiranto's choice of Johnny Lumintang because, although an excellent professional, Lumintang is a Christian.

Rumors also had it that if General Wiranto did not remove Johnny Lumintang from his new post, Habibie threatened to remove Wiranto as commander of the armed forces. On constitutional grounds, at least, Habibie had the right to appoint the commander of the armed forces. However, it is considered politically incumbent on the president to consider the military command's recommendation for the post. In any case, Wiranto backed away from the impasse by withdrawing his appointment of Johnny Lumintang from the post of Kostrad commander (Walters

1999, 62). Wiranto's official announcement denied the removal was political in nature. Implausibly, he also explained that, from the start, Major General Johnny Lumintang's appointment as Kostrad commander had only been intended as temporary.

The removal of Prabowo, the central figure among the "green generals," resulted in the disintegration of that camp. Slowly but surely, Wiranto neutralized officials once linked to the green camp. His strategy was to circle his rivals from outside, leaving many of the "supporters" of the green camp in their positions for a rather long time.

In the meantime, external pressures on the armed forces had shifted its main factions away from the "green" versus "red-and-white" divide toward pro-status quo versus reformist rivalries. Army generals in this first group consisted of those previously close to former President Suharto; the second group comprised rising reformers within the armed forces. The tension in the armed forces was consistent with political developments outside the armed forces, where students were spearheading the reform movement to cleanse Suharto's regime from his supporters. They were encountering bitter opposition to their efforts.

The TNI was not sheltered from these tensions. As commander of the armed forces, General Wiranto was to protect the former president until the time he might be convicted in a court. Wiranto's dilemma was complicated by the fact that he had earlier served as Suharto's adjutant. Indeed, during Wiranto's period as commander in chief, all four chiefs of staff in the armed services were men who had once been Suharto's adjutants. Perhaps out of insecurity or ambition, Wiranto felt the need to extend his power base beyond this small circle. As an officer with a career more in staff positions than field operations, he realized that, with Prabowo gone, the "green officers" were now without a political patron. This gave Wiranto an opportunity to move carefully and take control over former supporters of Prabowo. The ideological divide pitting green generals against red-and-whites had diminished greatly.

In the post-Suharto period, the military was not only busy with its internal problems, but also with its external relations. The resignation of Suharto changed the balance of power in the state in favor of conservative Muslims clustered around the Indonesian Muslim Intellectual Association (ICMI), an organization founded by Suharto and long under Habibie's leadership. As acting president of the republic and chairman of ICMI, Habibie enjoyed the full support of the ICMI leadership. However, political tensions between supporters of ICMI and the more traditionalist Muslims who clustered around Nahdlatul Ulama, the largest Muslim organi-

zation in the country, were great, and Wiranto had to move carefully not to offend either side.

Externally, during the transition period, TNI has also had to deal with violent ethnoreligious conflicts. The first incidents took place in the Banyuwangi regency on the easternmost tip of east Java. Popular belief says that the conflict was designed by active or retired military personnel for political purposes; however, to this day, there has yet to be a definitive investigation, whether by the military or civilian officials, into the killings. The tragedy clearly had religious dimensions. Local people killed those who were accused as being *dukun*, or sorcerers. The modus operandi for stimulating such violence was through the use of mysterious leaflets and pamphlets. A leaflet would be discovered announcing that on a certain day the people whose names were listed on the leaflet were to be killed because they were sorcerers; the leaflet would be signed by a local Muslim leader and preacher, often associated with Nahdlatul Ulama (NU—a Muslim party that at this point was regarded as opposed to Suharto). Then, as the Muslim leader desperately tried to explain to fellow villagers that he had had nothing to do with this leaflet or the planned violence, on the stated day some among those whose names were on the list were actually killed. Not surprisingly, then, families, relatives, and friends of the victims sometimes took revenge on the Muslim preacher whose signature had been found on the leaflet. The process unfolded in this way in a chainlike fashion. Hundreds of people were killed over a several-month period. Rumors abounded, including unverified accounts that claimed that some among the real killers were non-local actors operating at the instruction of Jakarta-based elites. And it was widely believed that, if these allegations were true, only the military had the skills to carry out the killings.

In Jakarta, another serious ethnoreligious conflict took place pitting Christian Ambonese gang members against Muslim residents of Ketapang Street in violence that came to be known as the Ketapang incident. The incident started as a criminal conflict. A group of Christian Ambonese hoodlums at a pool game place had a fight with a Muslim youth over a parking space. The hoodlums chased the youth into the adjoining neighborhood but failed to catch him; on their way back they are alleged to have thrown rocks into a mosque. (This claim was later proved false.) Several hours later, dozens of Christian Ambonese men attacked the same neighborhood. Residents fought back. The result was a bloody riot that ended in the torture and execution of several Christian Ambonese gang members. Again, there were unconfirmed reports that those who sparked the violent conflict may have been agents "assigned" by pro-status quo forces

to inflame religious and ethnic sentiments. Here too, many people felt they saw the hand of the military behind the brawl.

Following the Ketapang incident, a far more sustained incident of ethnoreligious violence erupted in the city of Ambon in the province of Maluku. Directly or indirectly, the Ambon violence was linked to the Ketapang incident. About two weeks before Lebaran (the celebration marking the end of the Muslim fasting month), several hundred hoodlums boarded a ship from Jakarta to Ambon. Then, on January 31, 1999, the Lebaran day, there was a street fight between a criminal and a driver of public transportation in the city. Within only six hours this fight erupted into a full-scale ethnoreligious conflict between Muslim and Christian Ambonese, as well as Christians and Muslim immigrants from nearby parts of eastern Indonesia. The riots that followed were some one of the worst in modern Indonesian history; more than five thousand people lost their lives.

There is strong evidence to suggest that the hoodlums who came to Ambon two weeks before the outbreak of violence were actually involved in sparking the riots. As in Banyuwangi, the possibility of political provocation in the riot was also apparent in the frequency with which provocative flyers and terrorizing telephone messages were circulated in advance of each outbreak of violence.[2] One flyer written in poorly made Arabic characters urged Ambonese Muslims to attack a Christian neighborhood. Discovering the flyer, the Christians were convinced the planned attack was about to take place, because the message was composed in Arabic. Muslims believed that the flyer was deliberately made by the Christians to provoke further conflicts because it was written in poorly rendered Arabic characters. Whoever was the author of these and many equally provocative flyers, the effect was immediate: more killings.

The riots destroyed much of Ambon city and had a profoundly disintegrative effect on the local military. The impact can be seen from the fact that one of the later recommendations of a military fact-finding team to the province was that the provincial police chief be removed. The team concluded that the chief took sides with his religious-fellows. Many soldiers who were on duty also took sides with their ethnic- or religious-fellows.

Less than two months after the Ambon riots began, Sambas and Singkawang areas in west Kalimantan experienced a similar explosion of violent conflict. This time, the conflict was basically ethnic, between local Dayaks and immigrant Madurese. However, both communities have different religious affiliations; the Dayaks are nominal Christians and the Madurese are Muslims. Just like the Ketapang incident and Ambon riots, the Singkawang–Sambas conflict started first as a criminal dispute which continued as a communal conflict colored with ethnic issues. This violence

also took hundreds of lives and spread into Pontianak, the capital of west Kalimantan. In Pontianak, Malay-Muslims joined the Christian Dayaks to fight the Madurese. Only after a month and the creation of some thirty thousands refugees was the violence brought to a halt.

The riots in Ketapang, Ambon, and west Kalimantan were only a few cases of ethnoreligious conflicts with evidence of clear political content. In the provinces of Aceh and Irian Jaya the military has also had to face ethnoreligious conflicts; the two cases there, of course, clearly have a different political nature. There the discontent of local indigenous people centers on the conviction that soldiers of the "occupation army" are overwhelmingly of Javanese ethnic background. In this manner, social conflict that originates in social and economic disparities as well as human rights violations ends by fueling demands for territorial separatism.

Ethnoreligious issues are a double-sided issue in the military leadership's view. On the one hand, ethnic and religious allegiances are seen as destabilizing entities that threaten national unity. Realizing that such issues can have a powerfully corrosive impact on its own internal structure, the TNI command has tried to eliminate the influence of such allegiances in its own ranks. On the other hand, however, the military command at times seems to indicate that it regards such allegiances as factors that can be mobilized to help it in its campaign to restore sociopolitical order. A striking example of this policy was the TNI command's response to student demonstrations in November 1998.

As the People's Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat, or MPR) prepared to hold a special session to discuss plans for national elections in 1999, student demonstrations against the Habibie government intensified. Unable to control the rallies and fearing accusations that they were violating human rights, TNI commanders adopted policies intending to shift the nature of the "confrontation" from a vertical one (students against government) to a "horizontal" one (pro-democracy students against conservative Muslims). Under General Wiranto's guidance, the military mobilized vigilante groups known as Pengamanan Swakarsa (lit., "voluntary security forces") or Pam Swakarsa. The groups were officially supposed to "protect" the sessions of People's Consultative Assembly. In fact, however, they were designed to put a halt to the pro-democracy student rallies and thus end opposition to the Habibie government. By relying on such "civilian" groups, the TNI command hoped to avoid being blamed for using coercive measures against the pro-democracy movement. In addition, the argument was made in mobilizing the Pam Swakarsa "volunteers" (most of whom were paid) that the pro-democracy students had been "contaminated" by

communist influences. The militias were enjoined to move against the students in defense of Islam.

In the end, however, the TNI's use of the vigilante militias backfired. Jakartan residents (known for their piety as Muslims) whom the military command had expected to side with the hired militias against the democracy students actually took sides with the students. When several Pam Swakarsa were implicated in acts of violence against ordinary Jakartans, local citizens reacted by killing several captured vigilantes.

## Toward a More Professional Armed Forces

The Indonesian Armed Forces is not an entity separate from its social and political environment. Pluralism outside the armed forces—especially ethnoreligious pluralism—has had a great impact on military doctrine, philosophy, perceptions, policies, and practice. For many years, the TNI's policies on ethnoreligious issues had a governing influence on events in society. The turbulence of 1998–2000 has decisively changed this relationship. Many progressive segments of society, especially students and intellectuals, no longer see the TNI as a unifying force in the country, but as a divisive one.

This change of relationship, of course, is the culmination of many years of tension between civilians and the military. Under Suharto, the military expanded its privileges in politics and the economy; it became a supporting pillar for the New Order regime. Lacking business skills but having almost unlimited access to state resources, high-ranking officers established "Ali-Baba" partnerships of cronyist patronage with Chinese businessmen. The patronage and economic benefits enjoyed by Chinese, however, caused resentment among native Indonesians.

Military training was once designed to reduce, if not eliminate, ethnoreligious allegiances and replace them with a sense of overarching national allegiance. Military trainees arrive at Tidar, home of the Indonesian military academy, still speaking their own local languages or dialects. Once enrolled in the academy, however, they are required to use only *bahasa Indonesia*, the national language. Other policies adopted by the academy were similarly designed to eradicate ethnoreligious identities. When these trainees graduated as young officers, they were posted and stationed in areas other than their places of origins. But history has shown that these policies did not work well, not least of all because they were systematically violated by a few in the armed forces command. In the final years of the Suharto regime, the TNI suffered from serious internal

ethnoreligious conflicts, although perhaps to a lesser degree than in society as a whole.

Pluralism is also reflected in TNI's vision, internally and externally. Internally, military doctrines state that as a professional military institution TNI must be based on merits and professional skills rather than primordial ties. Externally, the vision appears in its outward policies, such as the statement that the TNI's first duty is to maintain national unity. Animated by such a vision, the TNI adopted a *mission civilisatrice* paradigm in its attitude toward the rest of society. First designed as an instrument of national integration, the mission was quickly abused in the interests of the nation's rulers.

Indonesia is undergoing dramatic social, political, and economic changes. Unprepared for such a rapid process, the military moves hesitantly. It has to redefine its doctrines and practices. More serious yet, the military has to confront the fact that the nation faces a dangerous period of ethnoreligious challenge. A similar problem characterizes the Indonesian political elite as a whole. Ethnoreligious sentiments have been manipulated to rally political support, not least of all by Suharto himself. Only after Suharto's fall did the military realize it had to take measures to reverse these misguided policies. The actions taken thus far, however, have yet to produce positive results. Unfortunately, it is not yet clear the armed forces' response can help to reverse the process of social and institutional disintegration.

## Notes

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1. Under the New Order regime, its generic term was Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia (ABRI). However since April 1, 1999, in line with ABRI's internal reform, the name for the armed forces was changed to Tentara Nasional Indonesia (TNI, National Armed Forces of Indonesia).

2. I borrow and expand this example from a case brought forward by Munir, chairman of the Committee on Anti-violent Actions and Missing Persons, or Kontras, in his presentation to a seminar jointly organized by FKKB and RIDeP in April 1999.

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# Index


ABIM (Malaysian Islamic Youth Organization), 22, 64, 72, 210, 220, 221
Aceh, 25
Ali-Baba business partnerships, 26, 65, 83n. 4, 306
Ali, Mukti, 129
*aliran* (ideological stream), 268–269, 295
ALIRAN (Malaysian organization), 210, 221. *See also* non-governmental organizations
AMP (Association of Muslim Professionals, Singapore), 100, 166, 170–177; budget 174–175; divisions, 172; mission, 170; origins, 175–176; public image, 176–177; staff, 175; website, 169–170. *See also* Islam; Singapore
Anglo-American model of immigration, 3
archipelago, Malayo-Indonesian: ethnicity in, 12–19; religious change in, 13–18
aristocracy. *See* sultanates
armed forces, Indonesian: *dwifungsi* (dual functions) ideology, 292; ethnoreligious divisions, 297–302, 306–307; exploitation of ethnoreligious divides, 305; origins, 291–294
Artis Pro Activ (Malaysia), 162
arts: Malaysia, 142, 157, 159–160, 162, 163; Singapore, 92–96; Yogyakarta, Java, 124–125
Asian values debate, 38, 40, 44, 47

*baba* (locally-born Chinese), 50n. 12. *See also* Chinese
Bali, 25
*bangsa Malaysia* (Malaysian nation), 33, 77, 141–142, 154, 159
*bangsawan* (theater), 159
*Barisan Alternatif* (Alternative Front, Malaysia), 182, 183
*Barisan Nasional* (National Front, Malaysia), 202, 216, 219, 223
Buddhism, 71, 107–108; socially engaged, 107
*bumiputera* (indigenous residents), 19, 59, 186, 200; Malaysian Siamese relation to, 80
business: Indonesian-Chinese collaboration, 83n. 4, 134, 136, 306; Malay-Chinese "smart partnerships" in, 66–67, 76; as model of Malay success, 219–220; political party involvement in, 197, 218. *See also* Ali-Baba business partnerships; capitalism

capitalism: Chinese role in, in Malay archipelago, 17–18; dynamism of, in Southeast Asia, 7, 219; East Asian economic crisis, 7; embedded nature of, 6, 177; impact on citizenship ideals, 8, 45, 167–168, 178, 219–221; as model for Singapore pluralism, 179–180. *See also* business; Chinese

Censorship Board (Singapore), 94
Chinese: attacks on, 300; attitudes toward Indonesian nation-building, 51n. 12; attitudes toward Islamist PAS, 83n. 6; educated intellectuals, in Singapore, 108–110; impact of NEP on, 61; Indonesian Communist Party policies toward, 25; Indonesian labor movement and, 277; Indonesian nationalist attitudes on, 26–28, 34, 51n. 12; in Malaya and Malaysia, 17–18, 22–23, 50n. 11, 59, 61; Malay nationalism and, 23; Malaysian Chinese Association, 197–199; merchants class, 20; migration, to Malay peninsula, 18; New Order policies on, 26; population, in Indonesia, 25; population, in Singapore, 37, 89; role, in Java, 135; role, in Kelantan, 69–70; schools, 26–27, 29, 108, 161; Suharto attacks on, 33–34. *See also* multiculturalism; pluralism
Christianity: European policies on, in colonies, 15–16; in Indonesia, 259; in Malaysia, 31; Marxist conspiracy and, in Singapore, 98–99, 106–108; in Singapore, 39, 96–98. *See also* missionaries
citizenship: affirmative action and, 47–48; Chinese demands for, in Malaya, 23, 43; ethnically-differentiated, 27–29, 40; Furnivall on, in plural societies, 4–6; ideas of, 2–3, 180–181; Malaysian, as ethnically differentiated, 29, 208; multicultural, 3; Muslim debates on, 11, 45; religiously-differentiated, in Islam, 32; Singapore policies on, 38–41, 116–117, 180–181. *See also* democracy
civility: Clifford Geertz on, 49n. 1; democracy and, 10, 47; impact of Islamic resurgence on, in Malaysia, 11, 72; new language of, in Malaysia, 81–82; violent attacks on, 37, 48. *See also* civil society; pluralism
civilization: dialogue across, 221; Malayo-Indonesian; 12–15
civil society: Clifford Geertz on, 49n. 1; definition of, 9–10; development of, in Singapore, 92; idealizations of, 10, 42–43; in Singapore, 41, 87–88, 110–115, 117; Malay courts and, 21; Malaysian views of, 63, 221, 223; neomodernist Muslim views of, 130; relationship to the state, 45; theories of, 8–12, 43;
clan associations, 88
class, 269; Islam and, 274–278; New Order discourse on, 273–274, 283
colonialism: beginnings, in Malay archipelago, 13; beginnings, in Singapore, 86–88; destruction of indigenous commerce, 20; end of, in Malay archipelago, 6; gender ideologies, 257; impact on Malay nationalism, 23, 206; policy on Christian missions, 15–16; role in the creation of plural societies, 6, 19–23, 42, 178, 206; policy toward native aristocracy, 21–25
Communist Party, Indonesian (PKI): agrarian campaign, 35, 295–296; attitude on Chinese citizen rights, 25; destruction, 272, 296; labor organizations, 270; origins, 25
Communist Party, Malaysian (MCP), 207
Confucianism, 40, 108, 221
consociationalism, 29, 208
conversion, 14, 16
*cukong* (wealthy Chinese business partners), 26

*dakwah* (Islamic predication), 72; among orang Asli, 79; in Singapore 104; state promotion, in Malaysia, 185
Darul Arqam (Singapore Muslim converts association), 103–104
democracy: civil society and, 9; discourse of, 184; pluralism in, 253–254; public sphere in, 10; role of Islam in, 247–248; in Singapore, 41, 86–87, 115–117. *See also* Asian values debate, civil society, human rights, liberalism

Democratic Party, Indonesian, 284, 287n. 25
developmentalist ideology, 38, 41, 62, 184–187; impact on democratization, 186, 197, 202, 209
*dhimmi* ("protected" minorities in an Islamic state), 32
*dwifungsi* (military dual functions), 292. *See also* armed forces, Indonesian

education. *See* schools
elections, 36, 90, 186, 197, 201, 217, 263
English language: Singapore Muslim use of, 175; status in Malaysia, 160–161, 185; use among Singapore elite, 91, 108
ethnicity: anthropology of, 14, 18; canopied, 13–14; European attitudes on, 16–17; Malay, 18–19, 31, 184–187; nature of, in Malay archipelago, 12–19; role in philanthropy, 67; upland-lowland variation in, 15

*fatwa* (Islamic legal declaration), 240, 247
federalism, 168, 180
feminism, 98–100, 131–132, 262; conservative Islamist criticisms of, 248, 262. *See also* Rifka Annisa; Sisters in Islam
filmmaking, 150
Furnivall, J. S.: theory of plural society, 4–8, 42, 59, 141, 165–168, 176, 178–180; views on economics, 5; views of the West, 5, 6. *See also* plural society

Gadjah Mada University (Yogyakarta, Indonesia), 124, 126–127
Geertz, Clifford: 7–8, 48, 49n. 1; views on ethnicity, 18–19
Gellner, Ernest, 216
Gerakan Party (Malaysia), 199–200
globalization, 12
Gramsci, Antonio, 255
Guided Democracy, 295

Habibie, B. J., 279, 280, 302
Hamengku Buwono X, Sultan. *See also* sultanates, Yogyakarta
Hannerz, Ulf, 12
Hinduism, 12, 14, 15
homosexuality, 94; rights, in Singapore, 110–113
HRAF (Human Relations, Area File), 206–207
*hudud* (Islamic penal law), 32, 82, 235–236. *See also* Islam; shariah
human rights: 211, 221, 235; individual vs. collective, 1–2, 29, 47; Muslim debates on, 231, 235. *See also* Asian values debate; democracy; liberalism; multiculturalism
Huntington, Samuel P., 2
hybridity, 48

Ibrahim, Anwar, 32, 45, 63, 183, 205, 211–214, 219–222, 251n. 17; promotion of civil society groups, 221
*ibuism* ("motherism/womanism" ideology), 260–261, 265
ICMI (Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals), 130, 279–280, 282, 298, 302. *See also* Suharto
immigration: Anglo-American model of, 3; in Malay archipelago, 16–18; to Malay peninsula and Malaysia, 18–19, 60, 82n. 1; and the multicultural debate in Europe, 2–3
Indians: in Indonesia, 25; in Malaysia, 19, 23, 29–30, 31, 59; in Singapore, 104–106; merchant class, 20; Tamils among, in Singapore, 104
individualism: influence of, in Singapore culture, 92. *See also* human rights
Interfidei (Institute for Interfaith Dialogue, Yogyakarta), 130–131, 138n. 18
Internal Security Act (Malaysia), 186, 215, 220
Internet, 169–170, 175, 212, 213, 222
Islam: Chinese and, 17; class consciousness and, 274–278; conservative supporters of, in Malaysia, 32, 241; diffusion of, into Malay archipelago, 12–14, 17; European colonialism and, 15–16, 20–21, 49n. 8;

Islam (*continued*)
gender ideologies, 227–232, 234–240, 257–258; Indonesian regional rebellions and, 294; labor organizations, 269, 271; Malay courts and, 16, 239–240; Malay ethnicity and, 19, 22; and modern citizenship, 11, 185; neo-modernist, 129; official status in Malaysia, 29, 185, 242–243, 249; reformers, 11, 20, 21; resurgence, 45, 185, 227, 230–232; in Singapore, 39, 44, 100–104, 116; *ulama* authority, 247; UMNO policies on, 64–65, 242–243
Islamic Family Law (Malaysia), 233–235, 237–238, 244–245, 251n. 14
Islamic state, 32, 36, 241, 249–250

Jakarta Charter, 34
Jamiyah (Muslim Missionary Society of Singapore), 100–101
*jihad* (religiously-sanctioned struggle), 43
Justice Party (Malaysia), 45, 183, 210

Kadazandusun (ethnicity), 75
Kartini, R. A., 257–258
*kaum muda* (Muslim reformers), 16
Kelantan, 69, 154–155, 217, 242; Shariah Criminal Code, 235–236
KISDI (Indonesian Committee for Solidarity with the Islamic World), 282, 284, 288n. 39
Klang Valley, 143
Kuala Lumpur, 143
Kymlicka, Will, 2, 3, 47

labor: communist, 270; force growth under New Order, 274–275; movement, Indonesia, 269, 270, 278–282; Muslim, 279–282; regulatory reform of, 278; Singapore, 89, 91
Lee Kuan Yew, 37–38, 117. *See also* Singapore
liberalism: Indonesian rejection of, 35; problem of religion in, 36; Singaporean state rejection of, 38; views on group rights, 2. *See also* Asian values debate; democracy; human rights; multiculturalism
LKIS (Institute for Islamic and Social Studies, Yogyakarta), 129–130

Mahathir, Mohamad, 28, 32, 33, 64, 141, 185, 223; Anwar trial, 213–214; development projects, 218; early career, 217–21; policies on women's rights, 234, 245, 249
Malay: chauvinism, 145, 156–157; community, Singapore, 100–104, 116; creation of ethnic sense, 18–19, 22, 50n. 10, 184; new, middle class, 31, 45, 61–62, 81, 149–150, 158–163, 210, 219
Malay language: impact of Anwar trial on, 212; national status, in Malaysia, 29, 63, 150, 157, 160; origins and spread of, 13–14; use in Singapore, 175
Malay peninsula: migration to, 17–19; native rulers in, 21
Malaysia: ethnic population, 59
Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), 197–199, 210
Maluku, 43. *See also* violence
Mann, Michael, 276–277
marriage, mixed, 70, 73–74
Marx, Karl, 276
Marxist conspiracy, (Singapore incident), 98–99, 106
*masyarakat madani* (Madani society), 221. *See also* civil society; Islam
Mather, Celia, 274–275
Mendaki (Council for Education of Muslim Children, Singapore), 100–101, 169, 172
migration. *See* immigration
Mill, J. S., 1
missionaries, Christian: 15–16, 50n. 8; impact on Islamic reform, 20. *See also* Christianity
modernity, 12. *See also* civil society; democracy; human rights
modernization, 2, 205, 206–207, 215
Moertopo, Ali, 272, 273

Muhammadiyah (organization), 22, 128–129, 131, 132, 138n. 14, 259, 262. *See also* Islam
multiculturalism: debates on, in Western countries, 2–3; globalization and, 12; Malaysian, 162–163, 208, 249; religion in, 36; Singaporean, 44, 105–106. *See also* pluralism
Muzaffar, Chandra, 45, 210, 221

Nahdlatul Ulama (Islamic organization), 22, 26, 286n. 12, 302–303
Nair, Sheila, 158–159
nationalism: civic, 216; Ernest Gellner on, 216; Furnivall views of, 6, 168; ideologies of, in Malaya, 23–24, 145; Islamic reform and, 20–21; popular, in Indonesia, 24, 25–26; secular, 49n. 2
New Economic Policy (NEP), 30, 144, 183, 205, 216–217; impact on ethnic relations, 30–31, 61, 74–75, 151, 186–187, 208; political impact, 219–220
New Order regime: 253; collapse, 268; discourse on class, 273–274; exploitation of ethnic divisions, 274; gender ideologies, 260–261, 264–265; industrial growth, 274–275; labor militancy under, 275; origins, 35, 272; policy toward Chinese, 26–27
non-governmental organizations (NGOs): Malaysia, 63, 210, 211; Singapore, 110–115, 171–172; Yogyakarta, 125–126

Orang Asli (Malay peninsula aborigines), 77–79

Pakpahan, Muchtar, 278, 280, 287n. 33
Pam Swakarsa paramilitaries, 305–306
Pancasila (Five Principles), 35, 272
PAP (Singapore People's Action Party), 37–40, 86–87, 117; attitude toward individualism, 40, 92; ideological strategy, 87, 92, 116; monopoly of power, 86, 116–117; policy on welfarism, 96–97; social origins, 89–90; Tamil attitude toward, 105–106. *See also* Singapore
Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN, National Mandate Party, Indonesia), 132–133, 136, 283
PAS (All-Malaysia Islamic Party), 32, 64–65, 155, 185, 217; internal divisions, 64, 82, 241; success in 1999 elections, 83n. 6
People Like Us (gay rights), 110
*peranakan* (local-born non-native), 26, 50n. 12, 135. *See also* Chinese
philanthropy, 67, 96–98
pluralism: Adam Smith and, 5; civil society theory and, 9–12, 169, 253–254; democracy and, 1, 9, 253–254; in early modern Malay archipelago, 13–14, 16; Europeans and, in Malay archipelago, 16–19, 42; Indonesian military and, 293–300, 306–307; Malaysian, 60, 153, 155–156, 158–163, 206–211, 215–217, 223, 242; modernization theory and, 2; postcolonial, 27–28, 158–159, 206, 215, 223; reform Muslim discourses on, 129–131, 170–171; Singapore, 89, 168–170; state role in, 169. *See also* multiculturalism; plural society
plural society: colonial creation of, 17–19; concept of, 4–8, 165–168, 206, 178; Malaysia as, 141, 159, 161; Singapore as early model of, 88. *See also* Furnivall, J. S.
pluricentrism: in early modern commerce, 13
political parties, 200–201. *See also* democracy
polygamy, 229, 245, 251n. 11. *See also* women
population growth, Malaysia, 59
PPMI (Brotherhood of Indonesian Muslim workers), 279–282, 283, 287n. 29
*pribumi* (indigenous Indonesians), 19, 20, 30, 34, 134; attitudes on Chinese, 26

public sphere: recent growth of, in Malaysia, 63; religion in, 36; role of, in democracy, 10, 43, 46–47. *See also* civil society
Putnam, Robert, 9

Rais, Amien, 132–133
*reformasi* (democratic reform), 222, 278–279
religion: class consciousness and, 274–278; Indonesian state policies on, 27, 35, 40; interreligious cooperation, 69; new religious movements, 64; Orang Asli, 79; Singaporean state policies on, 38–40, 96–97; world, arrival of in Malay archipelago, 12–13. *See also* Christianity; Confucianism; Hinduism; Islam; shariah; violence; women
Religious Harmony Act (Singapore), 95, 106
Religious Knowledge Program (Singapore), 39
Rifka Annisa Women's Crisis Center (Yogyakarta), 131, 265
RIMA (Center for Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs, Singapore), 175. *See also* AMP

Sarikat Islam (Islamic Association, Indonesia), 25
Satya Sai Baba (religious movement), 31, 72
schools: Chinese-medium, 27, 29, 64, 89, 108, 161, 198; Islamic, 21–22, 24, 71, 73; Islamic, in Singapore, 101, 102, 171, 172–173, 175; mandatory religious education in, 35, 40; Orang Asli programs for, 78; Yogyakarta, 124, 126–127, 138n. 8
*shariah* (Islamic law): 234, 239–240; courts, 243; contextual views of, 248; Criminal Code of Kelantan, 235–236; in Indonesian constitutional debates, 34; relation to Domestic Violence Act, 236–237; satirical criticisms of, 22. *See also* Islam
Siamese (in Malaysia), 70, 79–81
Singapore: anti-colonial movements in, 89; attempted federation with Malaya, 28, 37, 49n. 5; Confucianism, 40, 108; early history, 87–88; government views on Chinese medium schools, 108; government views on Muslim schools, 103; Muslims in, 169–177; national school curriculum, 90; as plural society, 87–88, 168–169; population by religion and ethnicity, 39, 51n. 14, 87–88; state policies on citizen politics, 95; women's movement in, 98–100. *See also* Asian values debate; Lee Kuan Yew
Sisters in Islam (Malaysia), 227–230; opposition to Shariah Criminal Code, 235–236; support for Domestic Violence Act, 236–237. *See also* feminism; Islam
Socialist Front (Malaysia), 216
Socialist Front (Singapore), 91
Societies Act (Singapore), 111
Stivens, Maila, 255
Straits Settlements, British, 18
SUARAM (Voice of the Malaysian People), 211
Subianto, Prabowo, 300–302
Sudjana, Eggy, 280, 282, 287n. 31
Suharto: attacks on Chinese, 33; courtship of ultraconservative Muslims, 35, 40, 298; exploitation of Javanese tradition, 25, 35; religious policies, 35, 133; restrictions on Chinese, 27, 33. *See also* New Order
Sukarno, 27, 258
sultanates: Javanese, and Dutch colonialism, 24–25; Malay, 16, 21–23, 28–29, 184–185; Yogyakarta, 121–122

Tamils, 104–106
theater, Singapore, 92–96
Thompson, E. P., 276
TNI (Indonesian Armed Forces). *See* armed forces, Indonesia
*totok* (foreign-born Chinese), 50n. 12, 135. *See also* Chinese

*ummat* (religious community), 20, 248. *See also* Islam
universities, 185, 259. *See also* schools
UMNO (United Malays National Organization), 23, 28, 29, 45, 183, 186, 200; changing ethnic policy, 184–187, 217; internal conflicts, 214, 217; policies on women's rights, 233–234; rivalry with PAS, 32, 64–65, 217, 241–242; role in ruling alliance, 62, 216. *See also* Mahathir, Mohamad

violence: Ambon, 303–304; Banyuwangi, 303–304; civil society and, 10, 45–45; Clifford Geertz on, 7–8; in Indonesia, 33, 35, 36, 37, 43, 46, 120, 268, 294, 296; Kalimantan, 304–305; Ketapang incident, 303–304; in Malaysia, 29, 33, 183, 196; in Medan, 274; New Order collapse, 280, 299–300; New Order origins and, 272, 296; Pam Swakarsa paramilitaries, 305–306; in postcolonial Southeast Asia, 6–7, 29; "sorcerer" killings, 303; state factionalism and, 46, 270
voluntary welfare organizations, 96–98

Wadud, Amina, 229
Wahid, Abdurrahman, 36, 285
*wakil rakyat* (state representative, Malaysia), 187–188, 193, 201
Walzer, Michael, 1
websites. *See* Internet
West, the: Furnivall views of, 6; oversimplified models of, 49n. 4; Singaporean views of, 38–39
Wiranto, General, 299, 300–303, 305
women: activists, women, 98–100, 131–132, 262; colonial representations of, 257; Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination, 238–239; hidden curriculum on, in Islamic universities, 259–260; *ibuism* ("motherism/womanism") ideology, 260–261, 265; impact of Islamic resurgence on, 227–232, 234, 236–240, 245–246, 248, 259; Islamic Family Law, 233–234, 236–238; Malaysian Domestic Violence act, 236–237, 251n. 18; New Order ideologies of, 260–261; pluralist theory and, 254–255, 264–265; Qur'anic views of, 230–232, 246, 257; representations of, in Javanese culture, 256–257; Singapore feminism, 96–98; in Singapore Muslim organizations, 102; status in premodern Malaya, 232–233; status in the marketplace, 258; Yogyakartan Muslim women's groups, 131–132. *See also* feminism; Rifka Annisa; shariah; Sisters in Islam

Yogyakarta (Java): mythic origins, 119; political history, 120–121; sultanate, 121–124; universities, 126–127

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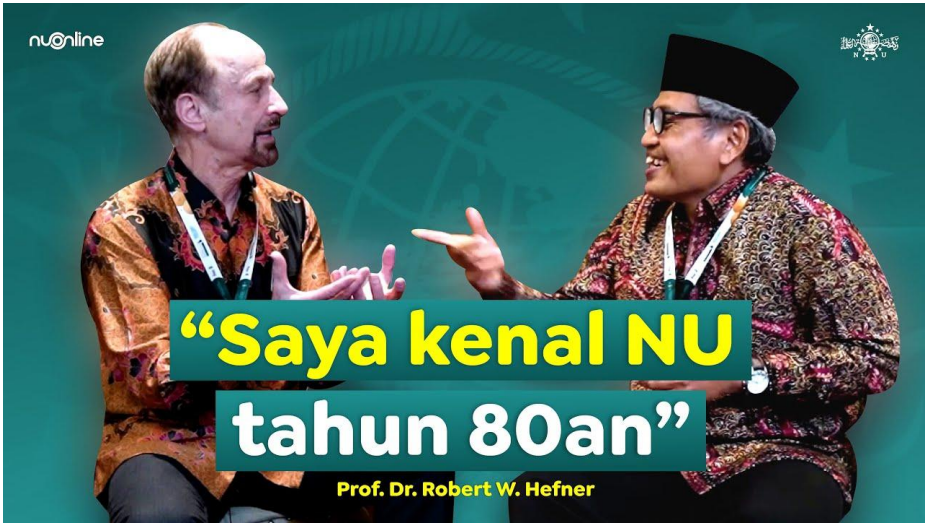
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